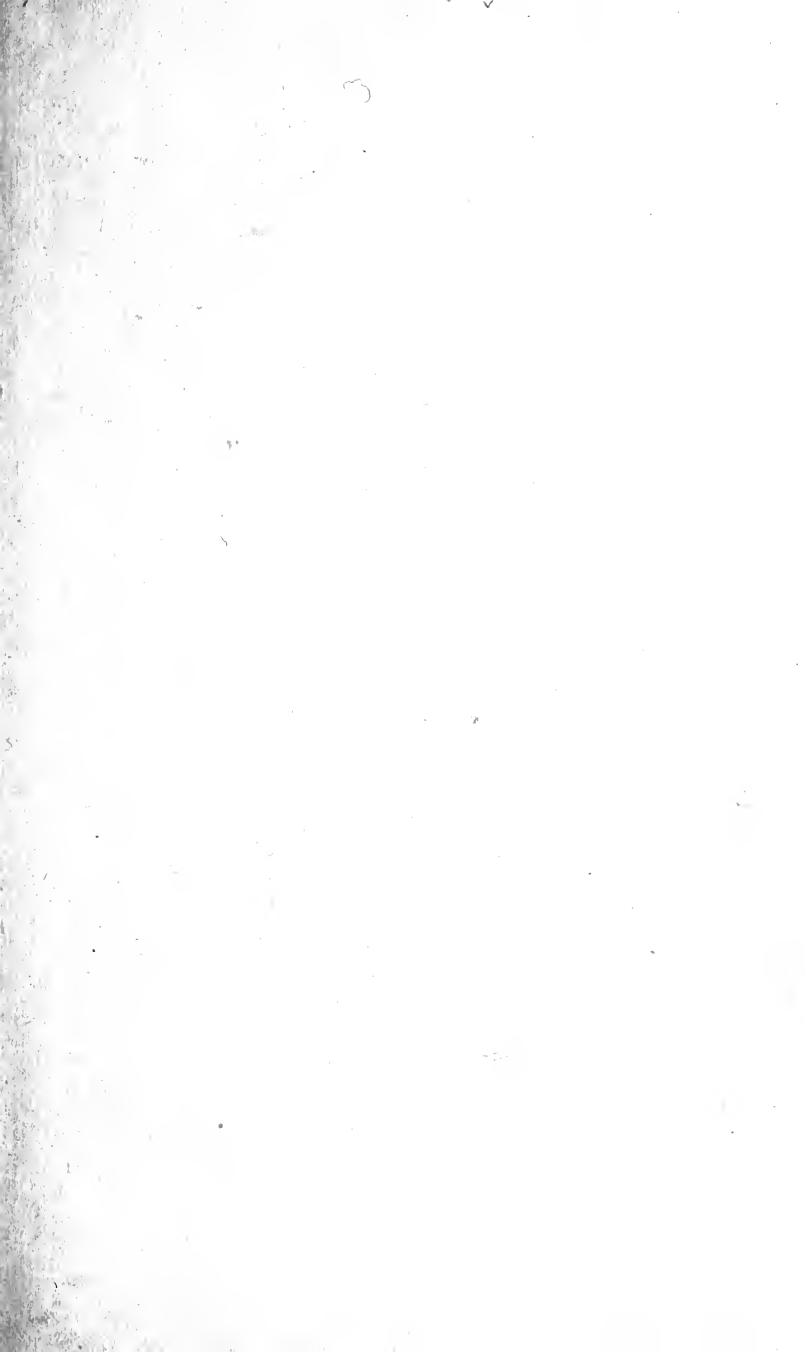


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JANITA'S CROSS.

VOL. I.



JANITA'S CROSS.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S.”

“Work and wait.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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JANITA'S CROSS.

CHAPTER I.



MISS HEPZIBAH RUTHVEN,

the half-maiden sister, or, to speak more correctly, the maiden half-sister of Jabez Ruthven, formerly

professor of mathematics in the united colleges of St. Mary and St. Salvator, and now proprietor of that commodious family residence known as the Aspens, was seated at work in her brother's drawing-room, one rainy evening towards the close of August.

Miss Hepzibah was a straightforward person—highly straightforward, and averse to concealment of any kind, except as regarded her age, a subject on which reticence is always advisable. Had she been telling her own story, she would doubtless

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have indicated the precise nature of the work she was engaged upon. I have no hesitation, therefore, in informing the reader that she was unpicking the bottom hem of a black moreen petticoat, which, like its owner, had evidently seen tough service in the world. But though the unpicking of moreen petticoats is, for those who keep no lady's-maid, a somewhat distasteful process, still the work in itself need scarcely have called forth the intensely disgusted expression which appeared upon Miss Ruthven's virgin features, as she jerked the unlucky garment to and fro, sticking her pen-knife viciously through the stitches, and occasionally giving it a vigorous shake, such as ill-tempered grandmanmas administer to little girls who have been telling stories.

The case was this. Only the day before, there had been a twelve hours' trip from St. Olave's to the sea-side, of which trip Miss Hepzibah had availed herself. And being, in consequence of her extreme good sense, averse to the usual practices of sea-side excursionists, such as bathing, donkey-riding, fossilising, lounging on the beach, and so forth, she had set off for a brisk walk along the sands to Onyx Reef, a ledge of rock about three

miles distant from Whitecliffe. Unfortunately the Professor's sister had forgotten that the tides have certain little peculiarities of their own, relative to ebbing and flowing; peculiarities which they are unwilling to alter for the convenience of ordinary people. Therefore, when, having rounded Onyx Reef, Miss Hepzibah, supreme in the consciousness of a duty well performed, turned to retrace her steps, she found, to her dismay, that the foot-path was being gradually nibbled away by the advancing waves, and that before long her walk would have to be accomplished through alternate sand-puddles and salt-water lakes. Nay, more, when she arrived within a mile of the town, she was brought to a complete halt by a beautiful little pool, enclosed by slippery rocks, stretching across the path and quite up to the cliff. A miniature ocean it seemed, with tiny breakers playing on the rocks, and shrimps darting hither and thither, and purple starfishes lazily shifting themselves along on their thousand creepers, and sea-weeds, green, crimson, orange, white, spreading out their delicate fronds, utterly unconscious of the distress of the respectable maiden lady who stood over against them, looking now at her neat black petticoat, and

then at the rocks, whose tops were gradually disappearing beneath the inexorable tide.

Fortunately, help was at hand, in the shape of a gigantic sailor, who was shouldering along to his cottage upon the cliffs. For a trifling consideration he offered to land Miss Hepzibah safely on the other side of her difficulty. The lady hesitated, the waves advanced, other resource there was none ; and so, with gaunt arms clinging round the sailor's neck, and feet helplessly dangling in mid air, Miss Hepzibah Ruthven crossed the flood, a spectacle for sea-gulls and fishermen.

It was the memory of this humiliating adventure which soured our maiden friend's face, as she sat by the fire one rainy evening in August, repairing the damages wrought by sand and sea-water upon her garments.

Miss Hepzibah Ruthven, aged fifty-five, or thereabouts, and possessor in her own right of a fortune of four hundred a-year, was to say the least of it, that is, not to do violence to the feelings of the sisterhood, or—but what various hindrances we meet in describing the personality of a lady to whom Nature has been the reverse of prodigal in the bestowal of charms ! Miss Hepzi-

bah, however, has to be introduced, and the sooner it is done the better.

For centuries past, the Ruthven women had been distinguished for slight, delicate beauty; whilst the men of the race bore away the palm from other clans for height of stature and strength of limb. But in the case of Miss Ruthven, Nature, passing over the beauty, dowered her with the physical force which had served her ancestors so well in the rude forays of bye-gone savage times. The Professor's sister stood five feet nine without her shoes. Mercifully, she was not broad in proportion, or she would have been altogether too serious an undertaking. She was spare and angular, with high shoulders, and a bony outline. Her mind was made to match her body; she had a strong will, a strong temper, desperate grasp of resolution, never letting go a notion which she had once taken hold of; a large heart, capable of containing many friends, though they got but rough accommodation when there; and a tough stringy sort of nervous system, which, if it did not bring her high enjoyment, saved her from much suffering. Harsh, noisy, unsympathetic, intolerant to a degree of anything like sentiment, terribly practical in all her

thoughts, words, and ways, there was yet a blind, blundering unselfish benevolence about her ; so that, on the whole, the world was better for her life in it.

Such, then, was Miss Hepzibah Ruthven, as she sat by the fireside this August evening, mending her petticoat, her merino dress pinned around her waist, revealing an under-skirt of striped winsey, and a slight glimpse of a pair of home-knit grey stockings, losing themselves in stout kid boots laced up the front. It was nearly nine o'clock : the lamp was lighted, the blinds drawn down. A somewhat heterogeneous meal was spread out upon the table—not tea, for part of a cold ham was there, and the remains of a dish of sausages sent out a savoury fragrance into the room ; not supper, for two or three hot scones lay upon a damask napkin, side by side with the tea and coffee-pots.

The fact was, Professor Ruthven had just returned from a two months' tour in Scotland, and his sister, who, whatever else she might leave undone, always took thought for the necessities of the inner man, had set him down to this well-filled table by way of compensation for his enforced fast during a ride of two hundred miles. Having

“made himself comfortable,” as Miss Hepzibah expressed it, he was now reclining at ease in a huge arm-chair on the opposite side of the fire.

A tall, thin, scranny-looking man was Jabez Ruthven. Almost a reproduction of his sister, save that he had a bald head, very full of bumps and hollows, and that his face wore a hazy, abstracted expression, quite different from her brisk wide-awakeness. In the prime of his life, Mr. Ruthven had been chief among the cluster of professors whose talents conferred such lustre on the University of St. Andrews. Even yet his name carried weight with it in certain literary circles, and his mathematical works, though long ago out of date, were mentioned by younger men with that patronising respect which is accorded to old-fashioned ability. In accordance, however, with the old proverb that a prophet has no honour in his own country, Professor Ruthven was looked upon, in the neighbourhood of Meadowthorpe and St. Olave's, as an undecided, bewildered, eccentric sort of man, good-for-nothing in a practical point of view, and only kept from becoming a complete laughing-stock by the vigilant supervision which Miss Hepzibah exercised over him. Apparently,

he had got through the history of his general adventures, for they had both been sitting in perfect silence nearly half an hour.

“Zibie.”

This was the familiar abbreviative by which, in their hours of domestic privacy, the Professor was wont to address his sister.

“I’m here,” said a voice not silver sweet, behind the rustling moreen.

“I have made a discovery, Zibie.”

“So have I, and a very disagreeable one, too. Sand enough in the tucks of my best petticoat to scour the floors for a twelvemonth. I did hope the odious stuff had all landed on the outside, but it hasn’t. Just look here—I declare it would provoke a saint!” and Miss Hepzibah went on unripping, every stroke of her pen-knife revealing fresh marine deposits.

“The sand on Whitecliffe coast is peculiar,” said the Professor, in grave, oracular tones, as though speaking to a class of students, “consisting, as the latest microscopic researches have clearly established, of the shells of defunct animals, reduced to a semi-pulverised condition by the waves, combined with the action of atmospheric influences.”

"Blessings on us, that must be queer sand! Then my petticoat will be a museum of natural history for the remaining term of its existence, for try as I will, it's clearly a moral impossibility to get it brushed clean," returned Miss Hepzibah.

The Professor had been rubbing a little of the sand between his finger and thumb as he explained its nature. Now, labouring under the delusion that it was a pinch of snuff, he raised it to his nose, and was about to inhale it, when he was stopped by an exclamation from his sister.

"Goodness, brother Jabez! what *are* you doing? I declare you must be going to have softening of the brain; do put the nasty stuff away into the ash-pan."

Which he did, in a very abstracted sort of way.

"And now about the discovery?" said his sister.

"Ah! the discovery; well, yes; yes, of course, the discovery."

"Quick, brother Jabez; what was it? A new fossil, or something in the mathematics?"

"No. You remember little Maggie Ruthven, my niece?"

"Ah! poor Maggie! A pretty rosebud sort of a little thing, with a face enough to put a man out

of his senses. Jabez, beauty is a dangerous thing. I'm sure property is a much more practical talent than personal gifts. I'm thankful that Providence never made me a belle, though people *did* say that I was a remarkably fine woman in my time."

And Miss Ruthven lifted her eyes to the mirror over the fireplace, but speedily lowered them. There was nothing specially beautiful to be met with in that direction.

"It is strange," she continued, "how contrary the world does go with some people. To think of that little bit of a lassie, how careful we used to be over her, and wouldn't even let the wind blow upon her, if we could help it; and now, for more than eighteen years, she has been knocking up and down the world with that good-for-nothing scamp of a husband, and may do to the end of her life, for I suppose neither of them dare come back to England whilst things are as they are."

"No, sister, she isn't knocking about now. She died at sea, more than eighteen years ago. They buried her in the Atlantic—I have the place in my pocket-book," and the Professor pulled it out. "Lat. 25 deg. N., Lon. 40 deg. A quiet part, not much visited by storms."

“Oh, Jabez!” said Hepzibah, with just one little quick breath. “How sad! and to think we should never hear of it until now. Ah, well! if we had only known how soon she was to be taken from us, we might have been kinder to her! I often wish we had not been quite so bitter when she went away with that good-for-nothing Captain Raeburn. She loved him, I dare say; and that was such a pitiful letter she sent, begging us to forgive them both. Well! well!”

Then there was silence for some time. The Professor made a sort of trellis-work of his long, lean fingers, and rested his forehead upon it. Miss Hepzibah leaned back in her chair, her feet on the fender, the petticoat lying unheeded in her lap. Sad, yearning, repentant thoughts were working in both of their hearts; thoughts which only come when it is too late, when death has stayed for ever the possibility of translating them into deeds. Gentle, tender thoughts, which, looking through any face, make it seem almost beautiful.


To say that Miss Hepzibah's internal exercises produced this effect, would be affirming a fact beyond the range of possibility. Yet, little by little, they softened the rugged lines of her countenance,

like the glow of Autumn afternoon sunshine on a stubble-field.

“But how came you to hear about it, Jabez?”

And then, clearing his throat, and drawing a sheaf of papers out of his pocket-book, the Professor began the important story.

CHAPTER II.

T was told in a fashion peculiar to the narrator, with many gaps, and breaks, and parentheses ; progressing like a crab, sideways, coming often to a temporary standstill, whilst something quite extraneous was dragged in. Also with many journeys of the professorial finger and thumb in search of imaginary snuff—a fruitless quest, which Miss Hepzibah stopped at last, by removing both herself and the garment out of arm's length.

Before giving the Professor's story, however, a few particulars relative to his own previous life will be needful.

When, more than thirty years before, Jabez Ruthven had been elected to the mathematical chair of St. Andrews University, and had set up housekeeping on his own account in a neat resi-

dence in South Street, long ago pulled down to make room for more pretentious mansions, he brought with him a little orphan niece, whom he had adopted. Maggie Ruthven was then a graceful child of twelve, winning and beautiful, like the rest of her clanswomen. For six years she lived with him, a beam of sunshine in the quiet old house. He thought she would always stay to cheer his solitary life, to make up, by her sweet girlish ways and playful affectionateness, for that other more beautiful love which Heaven had denied him. But at eighteen, Maggie ran away with a gay, soft-spoken young captain, who had stolen her heart by a few pretty speeches and moonlight rambles.

In point of worldly position, it was not a bad match for her. Captain Raeburn took his bride to a beautiful home, a few miles out of St. Andrews, and, for some time, all went merry as a marriage bell. The young couple gave balls and dinners, and quadrille-parties and picnics. They attended all the gaieties which could be got up in such a quiet neighbourhood. Maggie had fine clothes to her heart's content, more new jewels and lace pocket-handkerchiefs in a month than cross

Aunt Hepzibah would have allowed her for a lifetime. She was petted and caressed by her husband, courted and flattered by her acquaintances. Her life was all kisses and sunshine. She only longed for one thing more—the forgiveness of Uncle Jabez. And this she never got. For the Professor, like most men who have been disappointed in love, was harsh and stern. Once offended, it was a hard task to appease him. Letter after letter, in which poor Maggie had poured forth pleadings repentant enough to melt a heart of stone, was returned unopened. Uncle Jabez would never see her face again; he disowned her completely, cast her out of heart and memory. He could forgive anything but deceit, and little Maggie had deceived him.

In less than a year after their marriage, Captain Raeburn got into difficulties. He was a careless, unprincipled man, and contrived to mix himself up, or was supposed to be mixed up, in some fraudulent transactions connected with money matters. To avoid detection and exposure, he was obliged to fly the country. His wife, who loved him better than he deserved, followed him, accompanied by an old woman, *Ilsie Ross*, who

had been her nurse at St. Andrews. But she reached him only to find that love had taken flight with prosperity. She was received with taunts and indifference. A few miserable weeks they spent together ; then he left her.

She heard no more of him. Broken-hearted, wretched, friendless, she took passage in the next ship bound for England, intending to support herself in some quiet little village, where no one would know her. Still accompanied by the faithful Scotch nurse, *Ilsie*, she embarked in the *Janita*. On the passage home her child was born, and she died. Just before her death she committed the poor little motherless creature to *Ilsie*, who promised to rear it as her own.

But Uncle Jabez and his half-sister, Miss Hepzibah, heard nothing of this. They knew of Captain Raeburn's disgrace ; that he had fled to some out-of-the-way place in South America, whither his wife had followed him. But that was all. They expected that he was living abroad still, most likely prospering, as these clever unprincipled men often do, when they get away from law and restraint. They never spoke of Maggie, the sweet, tender-hearted little girl, whose smile had once

brightened both their lives. Her name became a quite forgotten sound. The only time that any thought of her crept into the Professor's heart, was when, sometimes on a Sunday evening, he opened his brass-bound desk, and took out the letters she had written to him from school ; those neat round-hand, carefully-composed letters, beginning "My very dear uncle," and always finishing with, "Your most dutiful and affectionate Maggie."

Very soon after Captain Raeburn went abroad, Mr. Ruthven gave up his mathematical chair, and came, with his sister, to Meadowthorpe. He had a little property of his own. Hepzibah's uncle, an old Lancashire cotton-lord, died, and left her two or three hundred a year ; so that, putting their means together, they had enough to purchase the Aspens, and enjoy life in a quiet way.

So much by way of preface ; now for the Professor's story.

They had been living in this quiet way for nineteen years, when Jabez put into execution his long-cherished plan of making a Scottish tour. After poking about for nearly two months in various nooks and corners, as yet unswept by the besom of civilization, he found his way to Inver-

allan, a romantic little village not far from Edinburgh, and there spent the last Sunday of his tour.

In Inverallan kirk his attention was arrested by a young girl, whose bright laughing face brought vividly back to remembrance the almost forgotten Maggie Ruthven of his St. Andrews life. She sat in the minister's pew, and was dressed like the minister's children, but she evidently did not belong to them, for they were buxom, chubby-faced, flaxen-locked lassies, and she had the clear dark beauty, the lissomeness of figure, and grace of motion which only descended to the Ruthven women.

Inquiring of the precentor, after service, he learned that she was an orphan child, domesticated for many years past at the Manse. She had been brought to Inverallan, when a baby, by an old woman named Ilsie Ross. As she grew up, the minister's wife took a fancy to her, which resulted in both child and nurse finding a home in the Manse, and now she was just the same as the minister's own children.

"And folks say," continued the precentor, "that she's goin' to wed Willie Home, the minister's son.

I dinna ken if it's true, but gin he gets her, she'll be a real bonnie wifie, for there's no a mair winsome lassie in a' the parish, barrin' the mischief. And oh!—but she's awfu' for the mischief!"

Ilsie Ross. The Professor remembered that name, though it had not been spoken in his hearing for nearly twenty years. He went to the minister's house, and had an interview with her. They recognised each other; then Ilsie told him all about it. He learned that poor Mrs. Raeburn, forsaken by her worthless husband, had taken her passage home in the *Janita*; how the vessel had been becalmed at sea; how, having dropped a tear on the poor unconscious baby's face, Maggie had died, finding rest at last from all her grief under the deep blue sea, which suffers no mourner to weep over any of its graves.

She told him, too, how the poor wife, cast off and disowned by those who should have protected her, had shut herself up from all love or sympathy. She would pace the deck for hours together, with clenched hands and pale face, speaking to no one, answering no questions. One lady, Mrs. Rivers, a widow, who was coming home with her young son and daughter, had taken a little interest in the

desolate woman, and would have spoken to her kindly ; but even to Mrs. Rivers, Maggie never confided her sad story. The child was born about a month after they embarked. On the following day Mrs. Raeburn died. Just before she became unconscious, she committed the child to Ilsie's care, charging her to be a mother to it. Ilsie promised. The baby was baptised by a clergyman of the Church of England, who happened to be on board. At the suggestion of Mrs. Rivers' son, Gavin, a lad of fourteen, it was named after the vessel, "Janita." On their landing, Ilsie brought her foster-child to Inverallan, where they had both lived ever since.

Such was the general tenor of the Professor's story, which being, as I said before, told crabwise, with numerous joints, and breaks, and parentheses, occupied nearly two hours in its delivery.

"Well, Jabez, is that all?"

"Yes, Zibie; I suppose I may say, that is all."

But anyone might have gathered from the Professor's manner, which was fidgety and constrained, that he had not quite disburdened his mind—that some thought, as yet unspoken, was cowering in the recesses of his capacious brain. Then

there was a long pause, during which scarcely a sound was heard, but the click of Miss Hepzibah's pen-knife through the stitches, and the gentle patter of the rain on the heavily-framed window ; and now and then a queer, uncomfortable, ghost-like sound outside, which would have made a nervous lady very uncomfortable, until she was told that it proceeded from the palsied leaves of a clump of aspens that grew in the middle of the garden. At last there came a quavering irresolute voice from the depths of the arm-chair :

“ Zibie, I had been thinking—or rather, perhaps, I ought to say—at any rate, it appeared to me in that light—that if you had no objection—that is——”

The Professor's idea having, like a frightened mouse, tried so many means of escape, and failed in them all, rushed back again to its hiding-place, from whence it did not venture forth for full ten minutes. Miss Hepzibah took no notice ; she was accustomed to these futile attempts at sentences. By and by, Mr. Ruthven tried again :

“ Zibie, I have been thinking if we should take this young girl into our house to live with us.”

There ! the mouse was out now, and scampering.

The Professor seemed startled at his own rashness; but the thing was said, and could not be unsaid. Miss Hepzibah looked at him steadily; hard, resolute, unconquerable practicality stamped on every line of her face.

“To live with us, brother Jabez, did you say? To be always knocking about under one’s feet, day in and day out, board and lodging, and everything?”

“Well, yes, that was what I meant; at least, it was something like it.”

“It won’t do, Jabez. A young girl is a very serious undertaking. Nearly nineteen, lively, and like her mother, as you say. Why, the gentlemen will be after her, until you won’t be able to tell the house from an hotel—first one and then another dropping in to tea, and supper, and wine, and what not. And then if she don’t get married, she will just settle down into an old maid, and the place is pestered with them already—women who have nothing to do but tangle round, and mind everybody’s business but their own. No, brother Jabez, put it out of your thoughts—put it out of your thoughts. I tell you it won’t answer, and there’s an end of it.”

This was said in Miss Hepzibah's most decisive manner, and emphasised by a shake of the black petticoat, which sent a cloud of sand quite into her brother's face.

The Professor's case seemed hopeless. But a certain poet has said—

“ Things are not what they seem.”

And the Professor's case was not what it seemed. There happened to be a little peculiarity in Miss Hepzibah's constitution. The good lady did not know of it herself. There are chambers in most hearts whose keys everyone has but the tenant. Miss Hepzibah was what is called *contrary*. Impress upon her the needfulness of doing a thing, and she would immediately find out twenty reasons why it should be put off till to-morrow. Tell her the same thing need not be attended to just at present, and ten to one, before the day was out, matters would be in full train for its accomplishment. If the Professor had a particular wish for quiet, he had but to tell his sister that the east wind was blowing, and that she would assuredly catch cold if she ventured out of doors ; and before half an hour had elapsed, Miss Hepzibah, cloaked

and bonneted, would be careering down the village, like a merchant vessel with all its sails spread. Of this little peculiarity, Jabez now proceeded to avail himself. With a deep sigh he began—

“Ah! yes, Zibie, it is as you say, a very serious undertaking to have the charge of a young girl, and I am sure——”

“There, brother Jabez!” said his sister. “I told you so, did I not? I knew you would come over to my way of thinking.”

“And,” continued the Professor, without heeding the interruption, “and at your time of life, too, when the natural vigour and energy of youth are overpast, to have to manage a girl of her age——”

“Time of life, brother Jabez! time of life!” and Miss Hepzibah gave the petticoat another desperate shake; “anyone might think I was a scranny old skeleton of ninety-five, by the way you talk. Such rubbish,—time of life, indeed! Why, I could manage a Spanish Armada full of girls, see if I couldn’t; yes, and keep them in proper order, too. Vigour and energy gone!—what next, I wonder?”

“At that age, too, girls are hasty and self-willed,” he went on calmly, dispassionately, as when

giving lectures on the cube root thirty years ago ;
“and you might find yourself unequal to the strife.”

“Unequal to what, Jabez ? Did I understand you rightly ? Unequal to control a girl of nineteen ? Only give me the chance, brother, and you shall soon see if I can't control her. Let her come next week—the day after to-morrow, if you like, and I'll engage to have her as tame as the canary before a month is out.”

“Next week, Zibie ! that is rather early to make arrangements for such an important undertaking. The domestic alterations, too, and at your time of——”

“Not a bit, brother Jabez,” said Miss Hepzibah, checking the obnoxious expression before it was fairly out. “I've everything in my mind's eye. She could sleep in the long room looking into the kitchen garden. Abigail could put up the curtains in a couple of hours, and Bessie would wait upon her—the girl is fairly running to seed for want of work. Such nonsense about domestic alterations, as if I hadn't a bit of spirit left in me ! I'll engage to have everything ready by next week, at the very latest.”

“Well, Zibie,” and the Professor sighed again,

“if you are so very anxious for the young girl to come, I won't object.”

Miss Hepzibah was somewhat confounded at this sudden veering of the compass.

“No—well, really! I didn't—but there's the clock striking twelve. You'll be having the heart-burn as sure as can be, with sitting up so late, and after such a supper. I'll tell you what we'll do, brother Jabez—we'll go to sleep upon it. I never think anything is properly weighed until it has been gone to sleep upon, and I'll tell you to-morrow morning what I have made up my mind to.”

So they said good night to each other, and Zibie *did* go to sleep upon it. Nay, more, she snored, and that so vigorously, that Abigail, the ill-tempered plain cook, said, that if missis intended to go on like that there, she should give warning, that she should, for it was worse than sleeping next door to a blacksmith's shop, where the bellows was always going.

CHAPTER III.



MEADOWTHORPE, the very name redolent of haystacks and new-mown fields, was a sober, well-behaved little village, about five miles from St. Olave's. Looking north, you might see the rising ground of Norlands, and beyond that the faint grey line of the distant hills ; but southward, for miles and miles, the country was flat and fenny, unvaried by anything more lofty than a windmill or a poplar-tree. So flat, indeed, that the tower of Meadowthorpe church, though but a pitiful stump, having been half battered down by Cromwell's men during their raid upon that part of England, was a landmark for the whole of the surrounding country.

Meadowthorpe had been re-baptised within the last century or two. In ancient times it was called

Dykewick, from the numerous dykes which intersected the country in all directions. That was the name it bore in Domesday Book; under that name it had lived through some stirring events, and won for itself honourable mention in historic records. It had been the head-quarters of Cromwell's lieutenant-colonel, Whalley, whilst his army was besieging St. Olave's. One of the great battles of that civil strife had been fought on the level ground lying to the east of the village. Many a gallant Royalist and noble Puritan soldier slept quietly enough beneath those fertile fields, where now in the sunny July time the hay-makers sang their merry song, and little children buried each other in heaps of red clover.

After the Restoration, the name of the place was changed. Dykewick was full of memories anything but pleasant to the Royalists. In consideration of the rich pasture and meadow lands which surrounded the village, they called it Meadowthorpe. And with its name its nature changed. The old Hall, where Cromwell had once gathered his men for prayer, passed into the hands of a cavalier noble, who filled it with revelry and mirth. The gay ladies of Charles II.'s court had many a

fête and masquerade in its wainscotted rooms, and even the merrie monarch himself, so tradition said, whilst residing at the St. Olave's palace, had often come hither with his lords and ladies, and made the echoes of the old place ring again with their boisterous glee.

But, at the time of my story, Meadowthorpe had long ago ceased to be the scene of such improper freaks. Its historic fame, too, was quite a thing of the past. Like some reckless young spendthrift, who after indulging in all manner of vagaries, settles down at last into sober, somnolent squirearchy, so Meadowthorpe, having sown all its wild oats, had been, for the last hundred and fifty years, as drowsy, common-place a village as even the staunchest advocate of conservatism could wish. The people seemed to be having a perennial afternoon nap. Gentle, innocent, respectable dulness reigned supreme. But I was going to describe Meadowthorpe—not abuse it.

You entered the village from the St. Olave's road, through a lofty stone arch, flanked, on either side, by a lesser gateway for foot-passengers. Over the centre arch were two lions, holding between them a shield, with the arms of the Dukes

of Dykeland. It was a shaky, moss-grown, tumble-down piece of architecture, yet it gave an impression of antique respectability, which was well borne out as you passed through it into the avenue of elm trees, the finest in all the country round, which led into the village. At the end of this avenue were the Hall gates. The Hall itself stood about fifty yards back from the road, behind a high laurel hedge. It was a red brick house of Queen Elizabeth's time, with many chimneys and weathercocks and gables; a grim, ill-tempered looking place in cloudy weather, but pleasant enough when the sunshine played over its balustraded terraces, and tipped with thousands of golden spangles the great evergreens which skirted the trim, old-fashioned flower-beds. Meadowthorpe Hall was the residence of the Duke of Dykeland's steward. It had been empty since the last steward's death, six months ago, but there was talk now in the village of a successor, who might be expected before New Year's Day.

Turning the corner, past the Hall gates, you came to Meadowthorpe itself; a long, wide, irregularly built street, chiefly of thatched houses,

with allies^y here and there, leading into nests of cottages, of whose internal arrangements, as regards draining, ventilation, and cleanliness, the less said the better.

These cottages were the nursery of a large juvenile population, which spent its time chiefly in playing at marbles and making mud-pies in the middle of the street. This, at any rate, was its favourite pastime ; but, towards May and June, the rising generation of Meadowthorpe was swept up into gangs by an overseer, and let out, at so much a score, to weed the neighbouring farms—an occupation which the youngsters did not so very much dislike, judging from the merry faces and loud songs with which they returned at night from their work.

After journeying for a couple of hundred yards or more up this street, you would be struck by a gradual improvement in the character of the houses. Fancy blinds, muslin shades, damask curtains, hinted of advanced respectability. Brass door-plates and lion-headed knockers replaced the rude latches of the lower end. You had gained the region of maiden ladies and retired gentlefolks, varying in means from the Misses Vere

Aubrey, who supported their five centuries of Norman blood on a pension of a hundred and fifty pounds a year, to Mrs. Sibree Macturk, whose husband, a rich Indian merchant, had left her a fortune of almost as many thousands.


A few steps more, and you stood in front of the church. Dykewick Church was founded by St. Edda, in the time of the Saxons, and had been growing together ever since, so that it was of the conglomerate order of architecture. Once upon a time it might have been beautiful, before Cromwell's men, riding through it on their chargers, tore down the carved capitals, and defaced the Gothic work over the west door. Now, only a clustered column here and there, a traceried window, filled in with rich stained glass, an old Saxon arch, with griffins' heads and dog's-tooth ornament, and one or two monuments of knights templars, remained to tell of the bygone glories of the place.

Behind the church was a quiet, retired, shady plot of ground, the cathedral close of Meadowthorpe, where the great families of the place congregated. Gentility Square, as the village people called it, was bounded on one side by the Bishop's summer palace, an old straggling ivy-covered man-

sion, the rectory, and the lawyer's and doctor's houses. At the end stood Gablehouse, the residence of Mr. Narrowby, the Duke's architect, and Meadowthorpe Cottage, where Miss Alwyne lived. Along the other end stretched the churchyard, with its fine old sycamores and elm trees, the pride of the village. Professor Ruthven's house occupied the remaining side; it was a narrow, uncomfortable place, with a gable end, and one solitary opaque glass window fronting the Square. From this gable end a high brick wall reached down to Meadowthorpe lane, the pretty sheltered road that led past Miss Alwyne's cottage. And from the cottage it led to some pasture lands, and thence to the haling-bank road, of which more will be said afterwards. For Miss Hepzibah has arranged her false front by this time, and put on her brown morning wrapper, and pinned a stiff linen collar round her bony throat, and is waiting to tell Jabez the result of her meditations on that little proposal of his the night before.

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CHAPTER IV.

HE Professor's sister came down to breakfast in a state of brisk activity. She had quite made up her mind. Jabez should go into Scotland as soon as ever he chose, and bring home the child, that he should. So far as her own personal feelings were concerned, Miss Hepzibah could not say that she anticipated much enjoyment from the charge; but, as her brother wished it, she was willing to make a sacrifice, and act the part of a parent to poor Maggie Ruthven's motherless daughter. Nobody should have it to say against her that she did not do everything that was proper for her brother's side of the family. Besides, it would be the making of the girl, that it would. From all the Professor had said, her domestic education must have been shamefully

neglected. She had been brought up in a shiftless, pet bird sort of fashion; just picking and fluttering about, like Bessie's canary yonder, in the kitchen window; not practical at all, not at all. Most likely she had never been taught to make preserves, or do marmalade, or pickle walnuts, or, indeed, put her fingers to anything useful; and as for looking after a house, or managing servants, and giving out the tea and sugar, and turning sheets sides into the middle, Miss Hepzibah dare venture to say that the girl knew no more about such things than a month-old baby. Singing Scotch ballads, playing reels on the piano, scrambling about over the hill-sides, paddling with stockingless feet up the water-courses, or perhaps sitting on a bit of rock, reading poetry-books, that was about all the girl had been accustomed to. And, therefore, being a woman of sound practical sense, Miss Hepzibah thought she could not do a more rational thing than guide her brother's niece along the narrow path which leads to female excellence. Then it would be such a triumph to show Jabez that even at her time of life, as he was pleased to call it, she was not past managing a girl of nineteen.

All this, and a great deal more to the same purpose, Miss Hepzibah told her brother at breakfast-time, the morning after that diet of snoring which has already been mentioned. So the end of it all was, that the Professor took her at her word. And he *did* go into Scotland the very next week, and found his way to Inverallan Manse; and putting his long, lean, scranny hand, into that warm-lined nest, drew out the little bird, all fluttering with fear. But what mattered it that the little bird fluttered and chirped so, and would fain have nestled back again into its cosy resting-place? Was it not a well-built, commodious, convenient cage, to which the lean hand was removing it? And would it not be treated with the most judicious kindness in the world? And did not the Professor know all about little bird-nature—in other words, had he not read through volumes and volumes of mental philosophy and psychological researches? And, therefore, did he not know all about the habits and customs of birds? And was it not much better that the wee lintie should leave those purple moors, where it had skimmed along in the sunshine over heather and blue bells, and come quietly to the Professor's cage, where it

would have a beautiful little water-glass all to itself, and now and then a bit of sugar put in between the wires, and be fed every morning with the best seed that could be bought in St. Olave's, put out for it in stipulated quantities by Miss Hepzibah's own hand? Oh! foolish little bird, to think that moorland liberty was better than judicious restraint! And yet it did think so.

But that the little bird thought so, and that good, kind Dr. Home, the manse clergyman, and his gentle wife, and the faithful old nurse, Ilsie, thought so too, was not of the slightest consequence.

Everything was settled by the Professor and his sister, whose claim upon their niece no one could dispute. And just a week from that evening when poor Maggie Ruthven's story had been told, a second heterogeneous meal, half tea, half supper, was set out in the old-fashioned dining-room at the Aspens, and Miss Hepzibah sat in her own proper seat by the fireplace, listening for the sound of carriage wheels up the avenue which led from Meadowthorpe gates to the village.

The night had set in chill and rainy again. That was a terrible August for the Dykeland

farmers. For three Sundays in succession, Mr. Mabury, rector of Meadowthorpe, had read the prayer provided in the Liturgy against a "plague of rain and waters," and still, for some wise purpose, doubtless, though no one knew it then, the rain kept falling, falling, falling, until the Meadowthorpe moat overflowed, and the Hall fields that skirted the marshes were one even sheet of water, and the miller's ducks swam delightedly over half an acre of his best corn land.

Miss Hepzibah had brewed the tea, poured hot water into her cups, and now, the folds of her black silk dress carefully set, and her best lace cap with brown bows adjusted neatly over her false front, she was sitting in state, engaged upon as near an approach to fancy-work as her principles would permit. The fancy-work selected for this occasion was an old tie of the Professor's, which she was covering with the best portions of a worn-out satin apron. The Professor was careless rather about his attire, and his sister thought that so long as he was kept moderately tidy, it was a pity to waste new material upon him.

The carriage wheels were heard at last. There was a ring at the door, a rattling of boxes, a flutter

of draperies in the narrow entrance. But Miss Hepzibah sat still. It was not etiquette in Meadowthorpe for a lady to go to the front door to receive her visitors, nor, indeed, to see them at all until they had renovated their toilettes, and repaired the ravages of a railway journey. So she waited impatiently, bustled round the room, rang for tea, changed the positions of the cups and saucers, got up, sat down, got up again, and was just on the point of going upstairs to take a peep through the key-hole of the long bed-room that looked out into the kitchen garden, when Professor Ruthven appeared in the doorway, leading the "mitherless bairn," towards whom Miss Hepzibah was to act the part of a parent.

"Sister, this is our niece, Janita Raeburn."

And Miss Hepzibah, looking down from her five feet nine of womanly altitude, was 'ware of a little figure not reaching to her shoulder, clad in a tartan plaid dress of some soft, noiseless material, without ornament of any kind, except a brooch of the same tartan, fastening a tiny lace frill round a throat that was very white and slender. Miss Hepzibah noticed no more than that just then. The tea was on her mind, and the sausages, which

would be spoiled, if Abigail did not take them up immediately. But there is no need for us to be so cursory in our examination of this stranger, this ocean-born girl, this wee lintie that had come from the heathery moorlands, to try how it liked the commodious cage, and the patent water-glass, and the best hemp-seed that could be bought in St. Olave's.

Janita Raeburn was nearly nineteen ; at least, so said old Ilsie, who proved it by referring to the log-book of the vessel's captain. But few would have taken her for more than sixteen or seventeen. She was slight and graceful in figure ; she had large, beautifully set eyes, having a peculiar droop in their lids, which gave a repose to the upper part of her face, quite at variance with the lower features, for the quivering upper lip told of pride and temper, and the finely-chiselled nostril of will strongly developed. Her colour came and went now like little rifts of sunshine in the early morning sky, betokening rain ere noon ; and her lips were held firmly together, as if to keep back any show of emotion.

On the whole it was a pleasant face. Not exactly beautiful. Not a face which sensible

people would fly into raptures about. Most likely no sonnets would ever be written to the eyebrows which formed such a slight straight line beneath the low forehead, nor to the quiet eyes which they shadowed; for those eyes were neither poetic blue, nor romantic purple, nor Italian black, nor sunny hazel, but only plain, serviceable brown. And the soul was as yet but half-awakened which might one day flash through them the glow of passion, or the warm light of love. And yet it was a sweet face, a face which might sink down into someone's thoughts, and stay there always, a face which you might love to see at your fireside day by day, year by year, all through life, never wearying of it.

Miss Hepzibah took the young girl's hand into her horn-like palm, and pressed upon her cheek an abrupt jerking sort of kiss. Then, without further ado, she marched her to the table, and poured out for her a cup of tea.

"I daresay you're tired, child. You must have something to eat, and then go to bed. I always say there's nothing like going to bed after a journey, whatever time of the day you finish it. Now make a tea, there's a good child. Jabez," and Hepzibah turned to the Professor, "she doesn't

look so much like her mother as I expected to find her."

Just then Janita looked like nothing so much as a frightened child, who would like to cry, but dare not. Mechanically she ate the portion of scone and marmalade which Miss Ruthven laid upon her plate; she would have enjoyed it as much, had it been shavings and sawdust.

The meal did not last very long. When it was over, Miss Hepzibah proceeded to the management of her young charge.

"Now then, child, your friends will want to know that you have got safe here; you must write them a letter directly, or the post will have closed, and then, Jan—Janet, dear me, I have forgotten your name, what is it?"

"Janita," said the frightened little voice, "but they always used to call me Nyta, because it was shorter and prettier."

"Nitre, sweet nitre; a kind of stuff sold in druggists' shops, good for cold and fever. Blessings on us, I never heard of a female child being called sweet nitre before! But I am not going to call you Nitre nor Janita either—I can't bear high-flown names; short and plain is the style that suits

me, something that you can get through quickly. We will call you Jane, that is useful and serviceable. Do you hear, brother? she is to be called Jane."

"Just as you please, Zibie," said the Professor.

"Well now, Jane, child, get your letter written, and then go to bed; you're looking tired. There's pen and ink and paper on the table by the window, and I daresay you've got stamps in your purse. And you had better write your letter at that table, because then you won't want to put anything out of its place. You know I like things kept in their places. Not a very long letter, child, just to say you have got safe here, that's all."

Miss Hepzibah was so fond of telling people *everything* they had to do.

Janita went to the place assigned, got out the needful materials, and wrote one word—"Meadowthorpe," then the date, August 25th.

Meadowthorpe. It was the first time she had seen the word written. It had a cold, dreary, unfamiliar look, meaningless, uninteresting. Years afterwards, when the name had knitted itself up with her life, she remembered writing it for the

first time, sitting at Aunt Hepzibah's little writing-table in that dingy, old-fashioned room.

Yes, dingy and old-fashioned. For whilst Miss Ruthven went up-stairs to see that the bed in the long room had been properly aired, Janita, with a few rapid glances, took in the general effect of things around her.

The dining-room at the Aspens was painfully neat. Everything was arranged in straight lines ; the chairs set with their backs to the wall, the books at right angles, the chimney ornaments in an even row, as if put into their places with a plumb-line. Even the carpet carried out the general angularity, being of a checked pattern, red and black squares on a drab ground, dreadfully ugly, but everlasting for wear. And then the walls, lines again, up and down stripes, wearying the eye with their unchangeable monotony. And yet Janita could not help looking at them, counting the stripes from end to end of the room and back again, past the stiff old family pictures and high-backed chairs. She was still doing it, when Miss Hepzibah returned from her survey up-stairs.

“Now, Jane, child, if the letter is done, you may

as well go. Blessings on us!" continued the Professor's sister, as she looked over Janita's shoulder, and found that the letter had got no further than the one word, Meadowthorpe, even that stained, too, with the fall of a great tear-drop. "This will never do. Crying, too!—dear me, dear me! There, child, we'll excuse you, it's all the journey; now, go and kiss your uncle, and wish him good night, and then you must go to bed."

Without a word, Janita went up to her uncle, and offered a kiss, which he put out his chin to receive. Janita thought it felt something like the bristly side of a clothes-brush, but she did not say so. Then she went to her aunt.

"No, I don't mind for being kissed, thank you. It isn't much in my way. Kisses are tasteless things to me, but I feel friendly towards you just the same without them, just the same. Good night. You'll find a candle lighted in your room, and be quick now, there's a good child."

"Well, Jabez," said the worthy lady, half an hour later.

"Well, sister?"

"Shiftless. That's *my* opinion."

"But a fine phrenological development, Zibie."

"Development or no development, I shall have my work set to make a woman of her."

"Ah, but look at the coronal brain, and the intellectual organs, especially the reflectives."


"Reflectives! such nonsense! I should think she never made a pudding in her life; her fingers are just like bits of wire, always on the flutter. And no conversational powers at all."

"But large conscientiousness. She would fill a situation of trust well."

"Would she? I know this much, I wouldn't trust her to sweep a room properly. People who dress in that natty sort of way never know anything about house-work. Shiftless, brother Jabez, shiftless and pretty-looking. That tells the whole story."

And with that Miss Hepzibah extinguished the lamp, as a hint that it was time for her brother to go to bed.

CHAPTER V.

T was a long, narrow room—prim, precise and proper—into which Janita found her way after she had wished her aunt and uncle good night. Spotlessly neat, too, like everything else at the Aspens. It seemed a shame to lay a brush on that snowy toilet-cover, or to disturb a single pin from the muslin-work cushion, where they were marshalled in regular lines, like an army in marching order. And as for sitting down in that so-called easy-chair by the window, and leaning your head back on its starched and frilled cushion, such a liberty was clearly out of the question.

If Janita Raeburn had been a sensible person, she would, doubtless, as soon as she closed the door, have knelt by her bedside, and, after expres-

sing her gratitude for a prosperous journey, would have proceeded to thank Providence for directing her path to such a compact, well-ordered family—a family in which her training would be so judiciously managed, where she would be so carefully shielded from the temptations of social life, and conducted, step by step, to the most enviable summits of female excellence. I have no doubt you would have done this, had you been in her position, and, of course, you would have done the right thing. But Janita Raeburn, if the truth must be told, was, at this stage of her life, not at all a sensible person. She was a wild, wilful, somewhat carelessly brought up girl of nineteen; having spent her time, as Miss Hepzibah wisely inferred, in scrambling up Highland watercourses, and sitting on the banks of Inverallan Loch, reading poetry books or fishing. A very child she was in knowledge of the world and its ways, a woman only in that generous affectionateness which would need to be trained and pruned to a terrible extent before life at the Aspens could become a very pleasant thing to her.

And so, instead of kneeling down and saying her prayers, she clasped her arms round the bed-

post, for want of anything more human to clasp them round, and leaning her head against its sharp carved work, began to cry as if her heart would break. Foolish child that she was! She stood there, sobbing and trembling, until the feeble light warned her that her bit of candle had nearly burned down in its socket; then, without even unpacking her clothes and arranging them, as a well brought up young person would have done, in the great set of drawers which Miss Hepzibah had emptied for her, she undressed and crept into bed, the great tears still stealing out from beneath her eyelids.

Oh dear! How faint and distant now the dear old Inverallan life appeared, though it was but yesterday she had bidden it farewell! But even one day of sorrow parts us so far from our simple joys and pleasures, making them seem like the dim sweetness of a half-forgotten dream. Lying there, with the quilt over her head to keep out the dismal rustling sound of the aspen-trees, Janita thought of her childish days, her merry games in the attic of Inverallan Manse—that great white-washed attic, with its four blue-painted cribs, where she and the Manse children,

Margot, Bell, and Agnes, slept. And how, when old nurse Ilsie had left them, they used to tumble out of bed and play at puss in the corner, until the moon sank behind the mountains, or a chance footstep on the stair sent them bustling away to their cribs again, where they pretended to be fast asleep. And then she thought of later days—of Willie, the foster-brother, who used to write her exercises for her, and help her with those dreadful rule-of-three sums. Kind Willie! Was he remembering her now?—or, perhaps, reading the little book she had given him for a keepsake, just before they said good-bye to each other? Then came thoughts of the dismal journey to Meadowthorpe, the stately tea in that dingy old dining-room, and the Professor's clothes'-brush kiss, and Miss Hepzibah's no kiss at all. After that everything seemed to get into a tangle. The great tide of sleep came slowly up, burying thought after thought, grief after grief, until, at last, one great wide sea of forgetfulness covered all, and the tired little heart found rest for awhile.

When she awoke next morning, the sun shone cheerily in through the white blinds. There was a great chatter amongst the sparrows in the ivy,

many chirpings and friendly salutations between the robins and blackbirds, who were swinging in the aspen branches. Janita rubbed her eyes; they were rather stiff with crying so much the night before, and then she took a leisurely survey of the room.

Things look so different when the sun is shining upon them. Nothing could ever make that prim, cell-like apartment like her own little room in Inverallan Manse; still it was not so cheerless as she had thought it the night before. The paper, which, by candlelight, had seemed of such a dull dapple-grey colour, Janita found to be covered with blue flowers on a white ground, as if some one had taken baskets of convolvuluses, and thrown them upon the wall, leaving them to twine about there as they liked. The bed was hung with white dimity, striped with little blue flowers like those on the paper. There was a very stiff, old-fashioned mantel-piece, at each end of which stood a white china dog, with a blue ribbon round its neck, and its nose pointing up to the ceiling. In the centre was a group, also of white china, representing a shepherd and shepherdess about to kiss each other. They looked so very near doing

it, and yet it never got done, that Janita felt as if she should like to push their heads together, and finish the process for them. But Miss Hepzibah took this group away before next evening, and replaced it by a figure of an old man with wings and an hour-glass.

There was a deep recess on each side of the fireplace. In one of these recesses stood the drawers ; over them a framed piece of embroidery, setting forth the Prophet Elijah as an old man in ribbed stockings and a red coat, taking what appeared to be an uncooked beef-steak from a dark-coloured bird, whilst a second was careering forward with a penny loaf in its bill. To match this, on the other side, was a sampler containing the alphabet worked in six different patterns, the corners filled in with trees, houses, gooseberry-bushes, or anything that happened to be convenient. It bore date a long time back—a very long time back—when Miss Hepzibah was a little girl in pinafores. Oh, these samplers ! How ill-naturedly they reveal dates and ages ! No wonder they are thrust into back bed-rooms by the very fingers that were pricked so in bringing them to perfection.

All these things Janita took note of as she lay in bed, rubbing her eyes. After a while she got up, drew the blind, and leaning her elbows on the broad, low window seat, took a survey of external nature.


There was nothing very particular to be seen from that side of the house. Janita's room looked out upon the kitchen-garden, never a deeply interesting object, with its rows of beans and cabbages, its clumps of parsley and patches of thyme, its square cucumber-frames, its long lines of raspberry canes and beds of overgrown rhubarb. But there is a time of the day when even rhubarb leaves have a beauty peculiar to themselves, when the early morning sunlight, pouring over the red brick garden-wall, creeps under and about their great broad fronds, pencilling them out upon each other in alternate light and shadow, and turning into many-coloured diamonds the tiny dew-drops which slide along from bud to bud of the tall yellow seed-stem. For colour, if that was wanted in the kitchen-garden, there were half a dozen pickling cabbages, with shining, purple-red faces, and one or two orange nasturtiums, which had crept through the hedge to have a chat with

their humbler but more useful vegetable relatives.

Miss Hepzibah was in the garden. She looked something like a pickling cabbage herself, for her face was very red, she having been making damson jelly ever since seven o'clock, and it was now half-past eight. She was standing amongst the French beans, with her dress pinned up, and a gingham hood, which was not at all becoming, tied over her black lace cap. But happening to look up she spied Janita at the long-room window, and raising her hands with a gesture of virtuous indignation, she set off down the walk as fast as a pair of wooden pattens would carry her.

Then Janita was brought to a recollection of the immature nature of her toilet, and she began in good earnest to dress. Luckily, a morning-frock lay at the very top of her box, with the tucker and sash belonging to it wrapped up together. And, by making a pass-over of her usual reading, and tucking up her thick dark hair promiscuously into a silken snood, instead of braiding it, as she used to do at the Manse, she managed to be standing on the ugly black and brown checkered carpet just as the nine o'clock bell rang for breakfast.

CHAPTER VI.

TRAWBERRIES preserved whole. I suppose that means strawberries preserved without breaking. Blessings on us! how *can* strawberries be preserved without breaking? But I was never beaten yet with anything in the preserving line, and I never mean to be. I'll step across, as soon as the jelly is done, to the Bishop's housekeeper—if anyone knows about preserving strawberries, she does."

These were the first words that fell on Janita's ear as she crossed the threshold of the dining-room in her pretty pink frock and cambric tucker, fastened by the tartan brooch, which Willie Home had made her promise to wear always. And Janita had promised, having as yet but a very vague idea of what "always" meant, or what Willie intended it to mean.

The words were spoken by Miss Hepzibah, who, spectacles on nose, was meditating upon the label of a little pot of jam which the Professor had brought with him out of Scotland.

“Oh! that’s you, Jane, child, is it?” she continued, as she caught sight of the young girl’s dress, made very conspicuous by the sunlight which shone full upon it, much too conspicuous for Miss Hepzibah, who thought nothing so suitable for young people’s morning wear as dust-coloured gingham. “There was something I wanted to say to you, Jane, and I’m sure your uncle Jabez will excuse my saying it in his presence. I hope you will not make a practice of standing at your window with the blind up, before you are properly dressed. I assure you it gave me quite a turn to see you this morning. I always say propriety is the first thing to be considered in the training of young people. When I was a girl it was not considered suitable for females to stand at their windows at all, but things have changed very much since then. And now prayers. That is to be your chair by the writing-table in the window.”

Janita went to the chair by the writing-table in the window.

“No, Jane, child, not that one. The right-hand side, I mean, and then I can see you as I read. I like to command a view of the family when I am reading.”

Janita went to the other side as directed, wishing very much she might either laugh or cry, or do anything by way of vent to the nervous fidgetiness which her aunt's perpetual cautions produced. But just then to sit still was her duty, so she sat still.

The two maid-servants came; one ugly, freckled, and sandy, the other a pretty-looking girl of twenty, with rosy cheeks, and wavy black hair; quite a picture to look at, if only Janita dare have looked at her instead of Miss Hepzibah, who was sitting now at the head of the breakfast-table, with the Bible and prayer-book spread open before her.

Miss Ruthven went through the devotional exercises with great rapidity, the Professor sitting meekly in his arm-chair. He once used to conduct family worship himself, but in a manner entirely too slow for his active-minded sister. Accordingly, she deposed him from his office, and took the chaplaincy into her own hands. So efficiently

did she get on with it, that, after the reading of the appointed portion, she was down on her knees, through the General Thanksgiving, and just upon the verge of the Benediction, before the tardy old Professor had turned round, shaken out his handkerchief upon the floor by way of a cushion, and composed his rheumatic limbs into a fitting posture of devotion.

Breakfast was despatched almost as rapidly as the prayers. They were never very long over their meals at the Aspens, unless they had company. At such times Miss Hepzibah felt herself called upon to enter into conversation, and then there was no telling at what remote hour thanks would be returned.

"You have got your clothes all taken out and arranged, Jane, child, I hope," was almost the only remark she addressed to Janita during breakfast.

Janita was forced to confess with a blush that the needful process was yet unperformed. Miss Hepzibah gave a triumphant glance towards her brother, which said as plainly as words could speak, "Shiftless—I told you so."

"Not got your clothes unpacked! Blessings on us! Why, when I was a girl, the very first thing

I was taught to do when I came off a journey, was to sort out my things, and put them all in their places, so that I could lay hands upon them in the dark. But it's in the family, that's where it is. I do believe I am the only Ruthven woman who has a proper idea of what belongs to the female character. I remember what trouble I had with your mother, poor thing, to get her into habits of order. You'll go up-stairs first thing after breakfast, Jane, child, and put everything straight."

And like a very good child, which she could be when she tried, Janita did so.

The Professor's sister was in the habit of saying that she had three gifts—one for cooking, one for domestic management, and one for conversation. The second and third other people thought were dubious, the first was real, not a doubt about that. This morning, the first gift was in the ascendant. There was damson jelly to be made ; so as soon as Miss Hepzibah had seen her niece fairly embarked on the necessary arrangement of her wardrobe, she betook herself to the culinary department, and was seen no more for the present.

Janita got her things sorted over, her dresses hung up, handkerchiefs, collars, and other small

effects, ranged in the separate drawers which Miss Hepzibah had designated for their reception. There was nothing more to do. There were no nice books to read, no young people to talk to. There came over her that almost unbearable feeling of weariness and listless indecision which is inseparable from any sudden change in life. She put on her hat, and wandered out into the garden, just to wile away the time. As she crossed the hall, Miss Hepzibah, with a check apron over her gown, and as many jars as she could carry under each arm, was bearing towards the still-room.

“Jane, child, where are you going?”

Already there was something in Aunt Hepzibah’s rasping and untuneful voice, which made Janita quiver every time she heard it.

“Nowhere in particular, aunt—perhaps into the garden.”

“Oh, into the garden; very well. But be sure you don’t tread on the box—it makes such work; and don’t go on the grass, for there was a deal of rain last night, and I always think footmarks show on the grass after rain. And be careful not to knock the gravel up with your shoes.”

“Yes, aunt.” Janita got a few steps into the

garden, when a second volley of cautions was fired after her.

“Jane, child—Jane!”

“Yes, aunt.”

“I forgot to tell you, don’t pluck any of the flowers. You may smell them if you like, but don’t pluck them. I am particular about collecting the seeds. And if you see a weed on the walks, you may pull it up. I always think it well for young people to have a useful purpose even in their recreation. There, I don’t think I have anything more to say. I told you, didn’t I, about not going on the grass, and keeping away from the box-edging?” And away went the check apron, with Miss Hepzibah behind it, into the still-room.

Janita stamped her feet impatiently. She always did so when she was in a bad temper. But it knocked up the gravel, so she must give over. What else was there that she was not to do? Not to pluck the flowers, not to go on the grass, not to touch the little prim box-edgings, not to, &c., &c., &c.

Oh! to be back again in Scotland! Oh! for a run over those breezy Inverallan moorlands, with Black Bess, the great Newfoundland dog, at full

chase behind her, or for a hand-in-hand ramble with Bell and Agnes through the Linlathan woods, or for a row across the loch, with Willie for steersman ! Anything but this interminable cannonade of cautions, and admonitions, and wholesome suggestions !

Janita got into the garden at last. Not much of a garden, though, after all. Very different from that at the manse, with its great straggling, unpruned flower-beds, its copses of fern and bracken, its winding walk, reclaimed from the wood that stretched all along the minister's glebe; its sheltered paths leading to home-made seats under trees where not a sound could be heard but the wimpling of the burn, or the cooing of cushat doves. The garden at the Aspens was neat and precise, like everything over which Miss Hepzibah had any control. It was enclosed by a high wall, covered, not with clematis, or ivy, or Virginian creeper, or any such useless finery, but with good, common-sense, fruit-bearing trees—currants, plums, apricots, nectarines, whose branches were tortured into straight lines, according to the latest discoveries of arboricultural science. There was a clump of trees at the bottom of the garden—one of

them a gnarled old apple tree, whose stem Janita found would answer charmingly for a seat, if only Aunt Hepzibah had no objection. And in the middle of the garden was another clump, chiefly of aspens, whose leaves seemed to have discovered the secret of perpetual motion. Besides these objects of interest, there were beds of all shapes that could be made out of straight lines, filled with plants, which bore their botanical names painted on little sticks, and had sheets of white paper spread out under them to catch the seeds if they fell. That was about all.

Janita soon got tired of this. There was a wooden gate in the wall; she opened it, and found herself close upon the lane which led past Miss Alwyne's cottage. It was a narrow winding road, overhung by elm-trees, through whose thick branches the sunlight only came in fitful wavering streaks. On each side were mossy banks, like those in the Inverallan lanes; so like them, that Janita felt as if she must go and look; and once beneath them, she strayed on and on, forgetting time and distance, as almost anyone would in that dear old Meadowthorpe road. For little harebells shook their heads amongst the moss, and fox-

gloves held out their purple sceptres over the tangled growth of ivy and bindweed, and ferns almost as delicate as those which grew upon the crags of Linlathan water-course, peeped from the crevices of the old stone wall at the top of the bank ; and now and then, through a rift in that old stone wall, she got a look out over the country side, past green fields, where idle sheep and patient bullocks were grazing, past Meadowthorpe marshes, and the Dykeland stray to the old Hall itself, whose red gables rose behind clumps of tall evergreens, a couple of miles away.

True, the landscape was not like that which girded her Inverallan home. Instead of purple mountains swelling round the horizon, there was here and there a windmill lazily twisting its long arms, or rows of pollard-willows, whose shining leaves quivered in the sunshine. And for the burn, the bonnie little Inverallan burn, that rattled on with such merry musical glee over its rocks and pebbles, there was nothing but a slow, sleepy, half-stagnant dyke, oozing through beds of river weed and miniature swamps of flags. And yet there was a certain beauty even in Meadowthorpe Dyke. For amongst the flag-leaves grew great irises, upon

whose golden flowers the dragon-flies rested ; and all along the sedgy banks were beds of forget-me-nots, such forget-me-nots as never could be found out of Dykeland. Janita wanted sadly to pluck a few of them. It would be so nice to send a bunch in a letter to Maggie Home. But dinner-time must surely be drawing on now, and if she was too late for that—Oh dear !

So she turned, unwillingly enough, and saw, about a hundred yards before her, a lady coming slowly down the lane ; a middle-aged lady she seemed, rather tall, very graceful, plainly dressed.

Janita had great perception of character. What most people arrive at by careful study of words and looks and ways, she found out by a sort of instinct, which she could neither explain nor comprehend. Half unconsciously she began to form her own opinion about this stranger, this lady who was coming so leisurely along. Janita thought her face almost the sweetest she had ever seen. Quiet it was, and full of thoughts—pleasant thoughts they must have been, from the smile they had printed there ; holy thoughts, too, for somehow that face made Janita think about saying her

prayers, and reminded her that they had been forgotten in the morning.

They had nearly met, when the lady paused to gather a great spike of fox-glove which grew high up on the bank. Too high, for after several vain attempts to reach it, she walked on, putting her hand to her side as if in pain. Janita ran forward, with a single bound reached and captured the flower, and placed it in the lady's hands. Then, without waiting for word or thanks, she darted away, glad only to have got a momentary look into those clear, quiet eyes.

And yet she felt, nay, somehow she was quite sure, that she should see the lady again; that, in some sort of way, they belonged to each other.

CHAPTER VII.



JANE, child ! Jane, Jane ! dear me, where *have* you been !” cried Miss Hepzibah, at the very top of her voice, as Janita entered the little wooden gate which led into the Aspens. “This will never do ; it won’t indeed ! Why, when I was a girl, I never thought of such a thing as going beyond the garden without asking permission, and here you have been raking down Meadowthorpe lane without a female companion, or anything of the sort, and no gloves, and I have been searching all over the house, wanting to take you about through the store-room, and show you where I keep the jellies ; and nearly two o’clock, too, and you in your morning frock. I daresay you never thought of asking Abigail what time dinner is put upon the table. Dear me, dear me, it will never do ! Why, when I was a girl——”

But here Miss Hepzibah's breath failed, and whilst she was gathering a fresh store wherewith to inform her niece how things used to be done when she was a girl, Janita took the opportunity of darting up-stairs into her own room to dress for dinner, hoping to propitiate her aunt by extra attention to neatness for the rest of the day.

Miss Hepzibah, however, was not to be propitiated so easily. Conduct of that description in a young person of nineteen was serious, very serious. It was doubtful whether, out of such material, a woman could ever be made. She preserved a dignified silence during dinner. As soon as they had retired into the drawing-room, leaving the Professor to his afternoon nap, she gave Janita a linen wristband to stitch, and sat down to the finishing of her brother's tie with an awfully severe expression of countenance.

Janita felt that somehow she had been very naughty. Coming down-stairs in the morning without saying her prayers was a bad beginning; she must not do it again. She looked up at her aunt shyly now and then. She wanted to go and kiss her, or to put her arms round that spare brown neck, and say, "Aunt, I'm sorry, I won't do it any

more." That was just what she would have done at Inverallan Manse if Mrs. Home had got vexed about anything. But Miss Hepzibah looked so very stern, and she held herself so very upright ; and when Janita's timid eyes met hers, such a cold, silence-compelling glance cut through those gold-rimmed spectacles ; and she had said, too, she did not like to be kissed. No, it was no use trying to set things right again in the pleasant Inverallan fashion. She must be a very good girl for the future—that was all she could do now.

It was such a relief when the bell rang, and a visitor was announced ; and then another, and then another. For, though the conversation was anything but interesting, and though many times Janita had to make use of the wrist-band to hide a yawn, still, even the merest dropping of commonplace gossip was better than that awful silence, that terrible feeling of restraint and unconfessed naughtiness, which chilled her in the sole presence of Miss Hepzibah.

From some cause, it might be the sunny afternoon, such a pleasant change from the drizzle of previous days, or the unexpected sound of carriage-wheels at the Aspens last night, which could

betoken nothing less than company arriving, Miss Ruthven held quite a levee, as she sat in her straight-backed chair, covering the Professor's tie. Mrs. Macturk, the rich widow, came first—a stout, middle-aged lady in green *moire antique*, and a Leghorn bonnet with a bird of paradise outside. She had very sharp black eyes, and a hook nose, reminding Janita of the parrot that hung up in the Manse parlour. When she had gone, Miss Matilda Vere Aubrey came, one of the aristocratic maiden ladies, who, unlike Mrs. Macturk, had so much Norman blood, and so little English money. And before Miss Matilda Vere Aubrey had finished talking about the weather, Mrs. Narrowby and her daughter were announced. Selina Narrowby was a quiet, fair-complexioned, well-disposed young person, of thirty-three or four—a model, as Miss Hepzibah afterwards informed her niece, of womanly excellence. Mrs. Narrowby had a great flow of conversation about parish matters, clothing clubs, and working parties, cases of distress amongst the poor people, whom she mentioned as if they belonged to quite a different creation from herself; not fellow-creatures at all, but only conveniences for the exercise of the charitable virtues.

She was very condescending to Miss Raeburn ; hoped, if she was going to make some stay in the parish, she would take a tract district, and join in the working party. To which Miss Hepzibah at once replied in behalf of her niece, that she wished Jane to embrace every opportunity of making herself useful, employment was such a very excellent thing for young people, it kept them from idling their time away—a severe glance from the gold-rimmed spectacles to poor Janita—or fixing their thoughts on foolish objects. And then there was a second glance, not at Janita's face, but at the tartan brooch which fastened her collar.

Janita did not know why that look should make her feel so uncomfortable. She was quite sure she did not care for Willie Home, except as a brother ; she would not have worn the brooch at all, only he had made her promise, and she thought people ought always to do things they had promised. And she did not think about Willie so much, only of course when she said her prayers, his name came in along with the rest. That was all, she was sure that was all.

Mrs. Narrowby was the last caller. Then came tea. Then it grew dark, so that Janita could not

see any longer to stitch the wristband ; and for want of something better to do, she played a reel with her fingers on the window seat.

“Jane, child,” said Miss Hepzibah, “that fidgets me. Can you knit?”

“Yes, aunt.”

“More than I thought. You will find a stocking of your uncle’s, then, in the left hand drawer of the sideboard, half finished. There is quite light enough for you to go on with it. There is nothing like employment for young people.”

Certainly employment is very good, but so is castle-building sometimes, by way of change. However, Janita took the stocking and knitted away at it all the rest of the evening ; and she did it so well, dropping no stitches, narrowing at such regular intervals, leaving no needle rows, looking moreover, so very steady and subdued, that she quite knitted herself back again into Aunt Hepzibah’s good graces ; and though that worthy lady did not kiss her when bed-time came, yet she said, “Good night, Jane, child,” in a softened tone, which made Janita feel quite like a good girl again, and moved her to unite Miss Ruthven’s name along with

Willie Home, and the rest of the manse people, in her simple prayers.

So ended the first day at the Aspens. But while Janita strayed down Meadowthorpe lane, and Miss Hepzibah scolded, and the Professor sat up in his study, half choked with theories and propositions, another sort of life, quite another sort, was going on at the lower end of the village, and with that life we must also concern ourselves.

CHAPTER VIII.



THE whole of the village of Meadowthorpe, together with the rich and productive farm lands stretching away southward for two or three miles, belonged to the Duke of Dykeland, and though but a mere tithe of his vast possessions, yielded him a greater revenue than is enjoyed by many a German prince. "The Duke," as everyone, from Mr. Narrowby, the architect, down to the village chimney-sweep, called him, was the autocrat of the place. No Russian czar ever exercised more absolute sway over the ways and doings of his subjects than did the Duke of Dykeland, or his prime minister, the steward, over the temporal destinies of the Meadowthorpe people. Not a hovel could be built in the place without his permission, not a window put out, or a door

fastened up. The clergyman, lawyer, doctor, architect, were all of his selection, and, except the clergyman, could be dismissed at his pleasure. And if now and then some spirit more daring than the rest, some incipient Cromwell or Hampden, chafing under the habitual restraint, boldly asserted his right to paint his own front door what colour he pleased, to have his parlour window made with a round top, or a square one, just as fancy led, or to surmount his chimney with a pot varying in design from that of his next door neighbour, why, the remedy was simple enough. The steward could send him a discharge, he could leave the place, and there was an end of it.

This state of affairs, though somewhat galling to people of an independent turn of mind, was, taking it altogether, wholesome. The village prospered under it. A farm in Dykeland was worth twice as much as one in any other part of the country. Lately, too, the prevalent rage for improvement had extended to Meadowthorpe. A few very, very old men and women could tell of the time when there was scarcely a tenement in the place more than one story high ; when an open drain ran down the middle of the street ; when

pigsties were built in front of the cottages, close upon the kitchen doors; when all the water required for drinking, cooking, and washing, had to be laded up in buckets from the half-stagnant, duckweed covered dyke which intersected the village. Now, all that sort of thing was quite done away. It was the boast of Meadowthorpe that not another place in England had a completer system of watching, lighting, and paving, or—excepting of course those allies and nests of cottages which were just going to be pulled down, and a few old outlying farm-steads that were not worth looking after—a more vigorous treatment of drainage and ventilation.

There was but one spot of ground in all the place over which his grace of Dykeland did not assert lordship, and this was a waste scrap known by the name of the mill slip, lying up at the north end of the village. There, of course, Meadowthorpe asserted its freedom, and practised its wickedness in a quiet sort of way. There the fairs were held. There travelling shows of tall women, and five legged sheep, and obese pigs, and other natural curiosities, pitched their tents, to the great delight of the shoeless village children.

There itinerant photographers took portraits in the highest style of art for sixpence each, one shilling coloured. There tumblers performed their antics, and thimble-riggers from St. Olave's races cheated unsuspecting labourers out of spare halfpence; and various other immoral practices were carried on, to the great horror of Gentility Square, who voted the mill slip a perfect nuisance, and wished that an act of Parliament could be got to incorporate it with the rest of the Duke's property.

But this was not all. If the mill slip harboured a great amount of badness, it was the means of bringing into the village an occasional breeze of fresh air and wholesome doctrine. For the St. Olave's temperance missionary lectured there on a Saturday evening, to the infinite disgust of Giles Harper, host of the "Checkers," whose snug drinking parlour he had emptied of some of its most valuable supporters. And once a week, on a Sunday afternoon, the primitive methodist minister from the little meeting-house in Norland's Lane, preached rousing, earnest sermons, though not, perhaps, of the most polished description, to those who had the grace to listen. So that on the whole it was an open question whether the incorpo-

ration of the mill slip would have been a benefit to the village or not.

Meadowthorpe was very exclusive. It made its own gas, and felled its own timber; its bricks and tiles were home-made and home-baked; its water was home-brewed, or rather home-filtered; it did its own carpentering work, and kept itself going in a general way without external aid. These operations were carried on in the Duke's yard, a square enclosure, some ten or twelve acres in extent, at the north end of the village, close by the mill slip. So close, indeed, that Mr. Andrews, the clerk of the works, could listen to the primitive methodist preacher from St. Olave's, as he sat in his parlour smoking his pipe on a Sunday afternoon.

From seventy to a hundred men were employed in these works. With few exceptions, they were a fine hardy set of fellows, with that thoughtful, resolute expression of face, which distinguishes mechanics and engineers from tillers of the soil. Indeed, the "Duke's men" held themselves proudly apart from the common herd of day-labourers, who, with ragged blouses, and great hobnailed boots, came tramping into Meadowthorpe from

their work in the neighbouring farmsteads. The "Duke's men" were the professionals of the working class, the Close families, in fact, of the lower social stratum.

It was a bright September day, about a week after Janita's arrival at Meadowthorpe. The prayer against a plague of rain and waters had not been offered in vain. For the showers were past and gone; the red sunsets of early Autumn had already begun to glow upon the western sky after days of unclouded sunshine which brought joy to many a desponding farmer's heart. Harvest was nearly over now. Only a few stooks remained here and there in the fields, and these were being slowly gathered up into the heavily laden wains. The elm trees in Meadowthorpe lane had begun to shed their yellow leaves; through the thinning branches of the cottage orchards many a ripe apple showed its rosy cheek to the sun, and the gardens were one bright, many-coloured mass of bloom, above which the big yellow sunflowers lifted up their jubilant faces, as if in thanksgiving for the fine weather which had come at last.

None so pretty as Mrs. Cloudie's. Mrs. Cloudie was the old woman who acted as carrier between

St. Olave's and Meadowthorpe three times a week. She lived at the corner of the Duke's yard, in a little cottage whose whitewashed walls gleamed through a perfect veil of honeysuckle and Virginian creeper. A lovely spot, "so very romantic," as the St. Olave's school girls said, who came to sketch its queer old chimnies and funny little lattice windows, and thatched gables. But "precious unhandy to live in," as Mrs Cloudie herself said; "for there's scarcely a room in which a grown-up person can stand upright, and never a place to dry a bit of clothes in when you've washed 'em; and as for the black clocks"—But Mrs. Cloudie *did* wax eloquent whenever the black clocks were mentioned, for they traversed her kitchen floor, and ran up and down over the walls, and rolled themselves about in her oatmeal jar, and nibbled up her tobacco, and if the new steward didn't look sharp and come there was no telling but what she might get nibbled up too, some night as she lay asleep in her bed, and then what would become of the carrier business, she should like to know, and she going regular backwards and forwards three times a week nigh upon thirty year, and knowing exact what everybody

wanted, and always true to the minute ; they'd get a man carrier, to be sure they would, and then see what a pass things would come to, what with his going to the public-house and getting odd drops on the way, until he forgot about his errands, and where the things wanted leaving, and goodness knows what.

But to-day Mrs. Cloudie was not turning over any such dismal contingencies, consequent upon the ravages of the black clocks. She had just finished her early dinner, and was leaning over the low fence which separated her garden from the Duke's yard, listening to an animated conversation between two of the workmen. The precise nature of the conversation has never been ascertained. Most likely it related to the variable, and, as some people think them, unjustifiable grades of social life ; for Destiny Smith, the chief speaker, parish clerk and Duke's man, was somewhat of a free-thinker in his private opinions, and inclined strongly to the second proposition of the French creed.

Mrs. Cloudie listened for some time with growing impatience. She was a quiet-hearted woman, who did not trouble herself with opinions of any sort. That things were so, she considered a suffi-

cient reason that they ought to be so. At last she could bear it no longer, and broke out into open wrath.

"Mr. Smith," she said, "it's a disgrace to the parish to hear ye talk like that, and you brought up so partic'lar as you was by your mother, bless her; and always taught to do what's right, and she so thankful for the smallest favour; there wasn't a gratefuller woman i' the lordship. But that's always the way wi' you men, more you get and more you want."

"I don't want no more than I work for, and every man has a right to that, accordin' to *my* line o' thinkin'. And I'll say it again, same as I said afore. The ways o' Providence *is* unekal."

"They *ain't*, Mister Smith, and you ought to be ashamed to say it, with a wife like yours, as wears herself to skin and bone tryin' to make you comfortable, and settin' you down to your bite and sup as reglar as clock-work; and makin' you broth twice a-week, as there isn't such broth in all the lordship o' Dykeland. It would just serve you right if someone was to give Mr. Mabury a piece of his mind about you. I reckon you wouldn't be let to stop parish clerk much longer at that rate."

Destiny smiled with an air of easy superiority. He could afford to let Mrs. Cloudie talk ; it amused her, and it did him no harm. Whilst he could roll out the responses so grandly with that noble bass voice of his, and lead the singing so that Meadthorpe church choir was the envy of all the surrounding villages, he was not afraid of being turned out of his place. Supposing he were to lose his voice, or have an attack of asthma,—why then he would need to be careful and smooth down the outside of his opinions. But Destiny threw out his broad chest, and cleared his throat ; he wasn't going to have asthma, not he. And he was safe enough.

“The broth's all right,” he said, “I wish everybody had as good. But I warn't going to partiklerise myself. Now look here. Yonder's the Primitives say it's folks duty to be good, and to live to the glory of God, and all that sort o' thing, and I've nothing to say again' it ; folks *had* ought to do their best to live decent and keep themselves off the parish. But it seems to me, if God Almighty intends people to live to his glory, it's a wonder he doesn't make 'em so as it isn't such a strife and a worry to do it. Now it isn't a hard thing for you,

Mrs. Cloudie, to keep yourself clean and decent, and do your religion proper, livin' alone in a nice tidy house, wi' things all spry an'—"

"Nay, the black clocks!" suggested Mrs. Cloudie, "they're fit to eat a body alive!"

"I don't care for the black clocks, they needn't keep you from bein' religious, if you've a mind to. And when you get agate with your temptations, and your exercises as you call 'em, you can just reach your bible or go down on your knees, and get yourself straightened again. But look at yon poor Irish folks down at St. Olave's, stewed together like eels in a pot, dirt here and dirt there and dirt everywhere about 'em, and dried up wi' reek and smoke, and never a sup o' fresh air or a bit o' sunshine, and never a minute as they can sit down and be quiet; and they're to live to the glory of God, are they, and be burnin' and shinin' lights, same as folks that he's filled top-full o' blessins? Now there's where I call the ways o' Providence unekal, and you can't beat me out of it, Mrs. Cloudie!"

Mrs. Cloudie could not, and therefore she wisely held her tongue.

Destiny's companion, who had been sawing away

at a huge block of timber, lifted his head now, and shaking back a quantity of shaggy grey hair, revealed the sunburnt features of Larry Stead, a Methodist carpenter from St. Olave's. Trade was slack in the city at present, and Larry had come out to Meadowthorpe to seek work in the Duke's yard, until times should brighten a little. His face had the sharp pinched look of a man who has to live on sixpence a-day and earn it. Still there was a genial brightness about him, the result of that steadfast deep-seated joy, which made Larry one of the favourite speakers at the St. Olave's weekly band meeting.

"Now it's just here," he said; "God's work for us isn't to meddle with ought o' that sort. There's a big heap of sin and misery in the world, as nobody knows why it was sent there, and nobody ever will. It isn't our business. We've got our own frontage to mind, and nobody else's. Now God Almighty's set me a work i' this here world. I've got to love my wife an' childer, an' saw wood as jimp and as clean as it can be sawed, and I does 'em both; nobody has it to say again me as I doesn't do 'em both. And that's what God axes of me to do. And when I've done it, there ain't

much time left to bother wi' things as He hasn't axed me to do."

"Ay, ay, Larry," said Mr. Smith, turning round for his jacket, for it was nearly twelve o'clock, "you ranters think you've got such a sight o' wisdom, there's nobody can come near you. But I don't believe in nowt but the church, and I don't believe in that much either. I got a great shake a bit since when Mr. Mabury was on about prayin'."

"Yes, I mind that sermon," said Mrs. Cloudie. "Ax and have, that was his text, wasn't it?"

"Something like it," said Destiny, with a patronising smile. It was scarcely worth while correcting the old lady's little mistake, though his superior biblical knowledge as parish clerk would have enabled him to do it. "He told us what a couple o' folks agreed to ax for, it should be given 'em. And thinks I to myself, when I heerd him, it's easy tryin' that anyhow. So my wife and me fixed as we'd ax for some fair weather for the bit o' barley, for it was nigh drowned in the wet. And we *did* ax, but it wasn't no use, not a bit; rain kept comin', comin', comin', just as if we'd never said nowt, and the barley got that rotten, while it

wasn't worth cutting. And so I said if prayin' didn't do more for folks than that, it wouldn't pay to meddle with it."

"Ah, but," said Larry, shaking his head, "that was putting the cart afore the horse. You should ha' prayed to get yer speritle interests advanced, and then put in a prayer for your barley when t'other was settled."

"Oh, that's it, is it? First come, first served; but ye see I thought my speritle interests would keep a bit, and the barley would spoil if it didn't get cut right away—eh, Mr. Stead?"

"I don't know," said Larry, meditatively. "Some Christians can't reconcile it to their conscience to ask for temporal blessings. I can. God's given us bodies, and it stands to reason we ought to behave well to 'em. Our dear minister was wonderfully led out in prayer i' the mill slip last Sunday afternoon on that very subject."

"I don't much matter them preachins' o' yours, Larry. I've heard a bit once or twice, but of course I don't make myself public at 'em, 'cause o' bein' clerk; it's sort o' beneath me to countenance dissent, or ought o' that. It doesn't seem to sit easy, though, his doctrine. Why, he'd have folks

keep their religion going all the week, and that's more than I'll engage to ; it 'ud get wore out over soon. It's as much as I can frame to make it last Sunday over, let alone the week service as I have to say the responses to."

Larry did not go into the heart of the subject just then, otherwise he might have given Destiny some useful thoughts on that which he practised so thoroughly himself—religion in common life.

"There's Roy coming," he said ; "he'll set it straight for us. Here, Roy, my lad, we were talking about church and chapel. You'll strike us a light about 'em, I'll warrant."

The person thus addressed had just come out from the saw-mill, where he was overlooker. He wore the ordinary workman's suit, but he might have been the Duke's son, or even the Duke himself, from the grand easy sort of dignity which sat so unconsciously upon him. Nay, his Grace of Dykeland would gladly have given up half the broad Meadowthorpe estate, could he have known for certain that his son and heir, the poor sickly infant, now whining in its coronetted cradle, would ever attain the build and stature of this young me-

chanic coming across the timber-yard, in his grey blouse and canvas cap.

He was a tall, straight, well-made youth of one or two and twenty, with light hair, and features of that clear distinctive type which is more frequently seen in halls and colleges than in the crowded workshop, or the rustic village. Yet it was not the finely-moulded features nor the curling light hair which made Roy so noticeable amongst the rest of his fellow-workmen. It was a certain almost imperial dignity in his mien and bearing, a way he had of carrying that proud head of his, a brave, lofty sort of independence in his very step. You felt, somehow, that Nature had made a mistake in putting Roy's head under the workman's cap, instead of the duke's coronet. He was the sort of man you might fancy to be a changeling, carried by the fairies when a baby from his own place in some nobleman's palace to the humble cottage of a common day-labourer. Or, perhaps a foreign prince, a second Peter the Great, doffing his royal purple to learn, in mechanic's garb, some art that might make his country richer.

And yet if you had thought this, you would

have been most completely mistaken. Roy was born and bred in Meadowthorpe, and so were his fore-elders for many a year, as the parish registers proved beyond a doubt. His father was Benjamin Royland, shoemaker and market-gardener; a very poor, honest, hard-working man. He lived in a small cottage down Meadowthorpe lane, a few hundred yards past Miss Alwyne's house, and often had a hard fight to make ends meet, so as to keep himself and a sick wife off the parish. Roy's name was Benjamin too, but to distinguish him from the old man, his comrades had invented this other name of Roy for him. Perhaps, also, because it expressed, in some sort, the kingliness of the young man's ways. And Roy *was* a king, too, in virtue of that moral majesty which, though it wear neither purple nor ermine, God never fails to crown.

He was going straight home, for the bell had struck, but he turned aside at Larry's call.

"We was balancin' up church and chapel, Roy. Destiny Smith puts in for the old institution, but I'm for a bit of new life. Now what do you say?"

"Well," answered Roy, taking off his glazed

cap, and shaking back the hair from his hot forehead—it was hard work there in the saw-mill for four hours running—"I mostly goes to church myself, because I was brought up to it. The prayers is always good alike—never no doubt about them. If the sermon's good too, I'm thankful; if it isn't, I hold my tongue, and don't say nothing. But I tell you what, Mr. Stead, I got a bit of a light upon these here things, last week, up at St. Olave's. You know now that work looses at five of a Saturday, there's a nice bit o' time left to go and have a read at the Institute, and I was agate with a lecturer as somebody in London had been giving to the folks there."

"Ay, Roy," said Mrs. Cloudie; "but they'll print ought, will them book-learned 'uns—and make you believe it, too."

"Whisht, Mrs. Cloudie," said Destiny Smith, "you're nobbut a woman, and book-learning isn't in your line."

Mrs. Cloudie looked rather disappointed at being thus pushed out of the discussion; but since there was no gainsaying the truth of Mr. Smith's statement, she wisely acquiesced.

"It was Dr. somebody," continued Roy, "who was giving the lecter, but I forget the name exact. However, that's neither here nor there; but he said how different people—people, you know, as lives in different climates—wanted different sorts o' food to keep 'em along healthy. Now, there's the Hindoos—it's a frightful hot country, is Hindoostan—folks is hard set to keep themselves from melting right away, and they never eat nothing but boiled rice."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Mrs. Cloudie, who, if she was "nobbut a woman," and, therefore not conversant with book-learning, knew as much about kitchen-stuff as anyone, "I never heard tell o' such a set o' simpletons! What! haven't they the sense to broil a herring to it, or a bit o' fat bacon, or anything to make it more comfortable in a manner?"

"Mrs. Clondie, now *do* hold your tongue. I say, Roy, go on, don't mind her."

"Well, then, there's the people up in Greenland; that's far away north, you know, where frost and snow never gets clear broken up all the year round, and men has to hap themselves up, face and everything, in furs, or the cold would

bite 'em to pieces in no time; and in Greenland they live upon nothing but fat—fat, and oil, and grease. It suits 'em, and they wouldn't say thank you for the best rice as could be bought."

Mrs. Cloudie held up her hands in silent astonishment. She would have preferred getting rid of a little in words, but Destiny Smith was standing there, ready to pounce down upon her, if she ventured into the book-learning department. So she was fain to hold her peace.

"Goodness!" said Larry. "What goings on there is in the world, to be sure! It's full need the missioners has to go to them there places. But Roy, I don't see how you can make that fit in to what we was talkin' about—church and chapel."

"Wait a bit, Larry. Well, I was wonderful interested with this. I read it over again, while I had it fairly off. And as I was turning it over in my thoughts, coming home, it seemed to me that it was a sort of thing as might be made to work two ways. People's minds is made different same as their bodies is. And religion, I mean the outside shape of it, has to be cut to suit 'em. Now, some folks has a heap o' life—more'n they knows how to get shut of; they're all for noise and liveli-

ness—sharp's the word, and quick's the motion. And that sort of thing goes into their religion too; for it stands to reason, a man must live himself out in everything he does; and they like a good brisk, noisy band-meeting, where the men shout fit to raise the roof, and the women is mostly crying for joy, and the Amen's drop so thick and loud, while you can't scarce hear anything else."

"Ay, that's it!" and Larry Stead began to quiver impatiently like a charger that hears the distant call of the battle trumpet. "That's the religion for me. Oh! bless the Lord! it does my heart good to hear 'em shouting Hallelujah, all in full sail for glory, and the dear minister leading 'em on, like a valiant captain, to the realms o' the blest. Its glorious! it is. I've shouted along with 'em, while I got that happy, I didn't know whether I was this side o' Paradise gates or t'other. There isn't nothing in quietness to match *that*."

"That's as folks think, Larry. Well, then, there's some others like it mild and easy. Thin food, you know, suits 'em best. They like to do their religion quiet. You'd frighten them into fits almost, if you was to slip in an Amen afore the

proper time. They can no more do with hallelujahs that aren't printed in the Prayer-book than you can hold yourself still when all the folks is shouting glory."

"That's my sort of religion," said Destiny Smith. "The Amens belongs to the clerk to say 'em, and folks have no right to take 'em out of 'his mouth."

"But we must say, 'Lord, ha' mercy' sometimes, Mr. Smith; a poor sinner can't help himself, can he?" said Larry.

"Well, then, there's a place in t' Litany for him to say it," answered the parish clerk, triumphantly; "and he must keep it back while the time comes for 'em all to put in together."

"Ah! well, I'm thankful I aint a joined member of the Church. When *my* feelings gets warm I must out with 'em, time or no time. I go in for chapel, after all; but I don't go in to find fault wi' you, Mr. Smith, for holding on to the old institution. As Roy says, some folks wants one thing and some wants summut else."

"That's right, Larry," said young Roy. "And now this is what I think: we've no right to find fault with them as doesn't mind the same sort o'

form we do, no more than we ought to laugh at a Hindoo because he hasn't a relish for fat, or a Greenlander 'cause he can't live all the while on boiled rice. Men's minds wants different sorts o' food, just as their bodies do; and they'll go with a sort of instinct to that sort as suits 'em best."

This view of the case seemed to strike both men as perfectly satisfactory. But Mrs. Cloudie looked up into Roy's face with a sort of meek womanly reverence.

"Ah! Roy, lad! ye were always such a one for making other folks come round to your own ways; there was never one to stand again you."

"Nay, granny, I don't mean that. I don't want to make folks believe nothing they haven't a mind to. As like as not, mine isn't the right way of looking at it; but it suits me, and so I keep to it. And, after all, there's a sight o' things in this world that the wisest of us doesn't know; a deal as wants clearin' up. But there *will* be clearing up by and by, there will."

"Clearin up! and what's that to you? You're always on about clearin up. I aint goin to clear up for no one. I aint afeard."

These words were spoken, or rather hissed out,

by a low-browed, flat-headed man, Peter Monk by name, who had come up unobserved, and now in passing brushed against Roy's shoulder.

Roy drew himself away with such a gesture as Paul on Melita's coast might have used when he shook off the viper into the flames. There was a silent, half-unacknowledged antagonism between these two men. On Peter Monk's part, it was the cringing antipathy of a low, depraved nature towards one bold, truthful and honest. With Roy, the feeling was somewhat different. He had once heard Monk use Bessie Ashton's name lightly, whilst bandying rude jests with his fellow workmen; and more than once he had seen the two walking side by side along Meadowthorpe lane—the usual evening trysting-place for rustic lovers. Yet Roy had no right to speak about it. For though he loved Bessie with all his heart, he had never found courage to tell her so, or get her to pledge herself to him. Whether she cared for him at all, he did not know. If she did, he was not yet in a position to marry, and Roy was too proud to keep a woman waiting for him. It might be a wrong sort of pride, but he had it all the same.

Peter Monk was a stranger in Meadowthorpe. He had only been in the Duke's yard since spring. No one knew where he came from, or what his previous life had been. He was one of the workmen in the engine-room, chief among them. He was a clever man, not a doubt about that; able to earn double wages to any of the rest. Report said that he had some money in a bank in London, and that he did not need to work at all, unless he chose. The old woman with whom Monk lodged, at the Dykeland Road end, quite believed it; but as he preserved a stubborn silence about his own affairs, the real truth could never be ascertained. However, the mere report had the effect of investing him with additional importance in the estimation of the simple village people.

Instinctively Roy and Larry Stead dropped the subject of conversation when Monk came up. He was a professed scoffer at religion. To name it in his presence was sure to provoke a quarrel. Larry began to talk about the new steward, who was expected before long at Meadowthorpe Hall.

"Folks say he's a rare strict 'un, Mr. Smith, and he'll make the men do double work from what they've been accustomed to. There'll be no more

dawdling about after the bell rings, in his time, I'll warrant."

Peter Monk smiled that sneering smile of his.

"He may try it on if he likes, but he'll find it won't fit me. I'd like to set eyes on the man who could make me do a hand's turn more than I'd a mind to."

"Ay, Monk, but they say he's such a way with him as no one ever seed afore. He's managed one of the Duke's places in the south country this good bit past, and he had 'em all under his finger like bairns."

"Or happen like slaves," answered Monk. "That's the way rich people grind down the poor, stamping of them under their feet, beating them to powder. But the masses will rise some day, and we shall see what we shall see. I'll do as I've always done, steward or no steward."

"But, Mr. Monk," said Larry, "a day's work for a day's wage—that's only fair, ye know."

"Yes, fair enough for drivelling folks like yourself, who haven't got no independence, and nothing to protect yourselves with; but I'm not going to slave for a man as has more thousands than he can count. Now look here. There's a

piece of work to be done, and I can do it in a day, setting to, right sharp."

"Well, then, I'd do it," said Larry.

"Would you? then I wouldn't. The Duke pays us so much a day, work hard or work easy, and I choose to work easy, and make it last three days instead of one."

"Ah! Mr. Monk, I'm afraid you'll be took count with for an unprofitable servant," said Larry, buttoning up his jacket to go home. "That sort o' thing won't stand in the day o' judgment."

"Day o' judgment!" and Monk shrugged his shoulders. "If folks chooses to be frightened with such nonsense, it's their look out, not mine. I don't believe in nothing as doesn't get me on easy; and when life's done, I'm done—that's my creed."

"Well, well, there *is* a vast o' things as is hard to be understood in this here world. But things as is to be, will be, and things as isn't to be, won't be; that there's my disposition and my religion, and folks may better it as can."

And with this brief compendium of his theological views, Destiny Smith put on his coat and went away home, for it was full ten minutes past

twelve by the yard clock. Roy went home, too, whistling as he went that low love call which seldom failed to bring Bessie Ashton's rosy face on a level with the top pane of the thick hammered glass window that looked out from the gable end of the Professor's house into Gentility Square.

CHAPTER IX.



Of course Bessie never confessed to herself, or to other people, that anything but the merest chance brought her to the gable window at eight, twelve, and six o'clock. She happened to be passing, that was all, and the window blind had got a little bit crooked, so that she thought she had better get up and set it straight; or there was a noise in the street, and she just looked out to see what it was; or those tiresome boys had been throwing stones over the wall again—really those boys were past bearing with their impertinence, it was a shame the policeman did not take them up; or—but it was easy for Bessie to show why she should always have something to do at that gable end window when Roy's clear note came carolling up from the lower end of the street.

Bessie Ashton was housemaid at the Aspens, and a hard place she found it, too. But a servant who had lived twelve months with Miss Ruthven, could get almost any situation after that. People never asked if she was tidy, if she was good-tempered, if she was punctual, if she was honest—she had lived a year at the Aspens, and that was quite enough. For Miss Hepzibah's prowess as a housekeeper and trainer of servants was proverbial. Bessie was a very pretty girl. She had a clear complexion, plenty of glossy dark hair, which waved over a forehead white as any lady's, and which Miss Hepzibah compelled her to tuck up inside a white muslin cap, instead of wearing it in a chenille net, which Bessie would very much have preferred; and, indeed, when she went once a quarter to take tea and spend the afternoon with her married sister in St. Olave's, she *did* have it in a net, spite of Miss Hepzibah. She had a very pretty profile, too, a rounded chin and throat, which a painter might have taken for his model, and rosy lips, which were always curling themselves up into smiles when Bessie was in a good temper.

Most people thought Bessie Ashton's eyes were dark, to match her hair. But Roy knew better.

He had looked down into them again and again and found that they were clear, beautiful grey-blue; only the long black eye-lashes made them look dark, for those eyelashes were so very long and thick. When she stood in church, looking at her prayer-book, they almost swept down upon her cheek. Roy, in the singing-gallery, had studied them many and many a time when people thought he was giving all his mind to the chanting of the anthem. And if Bessie lifted them sometimes, and gave him a look at the grey-blue eyes underneath, Roy used to feel so happy.

Bessie Ashton knew that she was very nice looking. Unconscious beauty, like beauty unadorned, is for the most part a delusion. There was never a young girl yet, housemaid, commoner, or peeress, who did not give herself credit for quite as much beauty as she possessed—often much more. No need to tell Bessie that, when dressed in her best Sunday clothes, and her new straw bonnet, trimmed with white ribbons and a plain net cap inside, with just one little bow of blue ribbon, there was not a prettier girl anywhere amongst the Meadowthorpe servants; and not many even amongst the young ladies of the village, who came to church in their

fine tulle bonnets, with flowers inside and out, and their beautiful pale kid gloves, and their lace shawls, and flounced silk dresses that looked so resplendent when the sunlight shone down upon them through the stained glass windows. She knew it by the glances which Mrs. Mabury's frowsy kitchen-maid cast at her from the back corner of the Rectory pew; and the envious sneer of Batkins, the bishop's ladies' maid, or rather the bishop's lady's ladies' maid, who had a complexion like decayed cheese, and greenish eyes with no lashes to them. And if these proofs had not been sufficient, she knew it by the admiring looks which came from the blacksmith's pew, where young Alick sat; and the others quite as admiring, which Peter Monk gave, as he stood in the church porch watching the people come out. But most of all she knew it, when, looking up by chance from her prayer-book, she found Roy's gaze fixed upon her. Then her eyes used to drop directly, and she dare not lift them for ever so long after.

But Bessie did not care for Roy; she was sure she did not. He might look at her from his place in the singing-gallery until Martinmas if he liked, or bring her roses out of his father's garden, or

whistle past that gable end window until his throat fairly ached again ; it did not make a bit of difference, that it did not.

There were a great many people in the village who, as the country phrase goes, "looked sweet" upon Bessie Ashton, but she did not think she cared much for any of them, at least not much to speak of. There was young Alick, the blacksmith ; he had a very good business, and could afford to marry her out of hand there and then if she chose ; but Bessie did not choose. She would about as soon stay housemaid at Miss Hepzibah's as live close to the forge, and hear that great hammer always going, going, going ; to say nothing of the smuts which would never give her a day's rest from washing and dusting. No, Bessie would not marry young Alick. Then there was the tall footman at the bishop's palace ; he had walked her home from church several times lately, and been what young ladies would call "very marked" in his attentions. Bessie, however, did not call it being very marked, her phrase was "partic'lar friendly," which was just as expressive. But the tall footman might be as "partic'lar friendly" as he liked, she wasn't going to marry into service again, not she—she had had

enough of that. Next on the list came Peter Monk. True, he was very ugly, and small of stature, but he had plenty of money, and everybody knew that good looks wore out. Mrs. Peter Monk might have a new dress three or four times a year, besides bonnets almost as often as she liked. She would think a little more about that. "Mrs. Peter Monk!"—it did not sound badly, not at all.

And there was Roy. Somehow Bessie always thought of him when the rest had had their claims dismissed. Roy, who had such a beautiful voice, and whistled like a blackbird, and walked so straight, and had such a way with him as no one else had,—no, not even the Duke. But Roy was badly off. It took most of his earnings to pay the doctor's bill for poor old Mrs. Royland, who was laid up with liver complaint. He wouldn't be able to marry for a long time, perhaps three or four years, and Bessie scarcely thought she could wait so long as that. And yet—and yet, Roy was very good to her.

But whilst Bessie was pondering it over in her mind, Miss Hepzibah's shrill voice would come ringing through the house. "Bessie! Bessie! Blessings on us, where *is* the girl? Always idling

about somewhere—dear me, dear me! what *will* servants come to?”

And then Bessie felt as if she could marry anybody, even Alick himself, and live anywhere to be out of reach of that perpetual scold.

Bessie was not a Meadowthorpe girl. She had no parents, and no regular home when out of service, except with her sister, who was married to a greengrocer in St. Olave's. And she had not many friends in the village, at least not many places where she could go to tea on her holiday afternoons, or drop in for five minutes if she happened to be out on an errand. So that her flirting occupations were carried on in a very casual, precarious sort of way, in the open air, at the church porch, or in Meadowthorpe lane, which was the general rendezvous of all the rustic couples. Miss Hepzibah allowed no followers. That was quite understood. Woe to the unlucky wight whose strength of affection led him into the sacred enclosure of the Aspens' garden, or tempted him to prowl uninvited round its back door, waiting for a glimpse of his loved one. Only let Miss Hepzibah catch him, and surely enough both he and the loved one would come to grief.

But where there's a will there's a way. Bessie did manage, from time to time, to see her friends, and scrape a little romance into the dull routine of domestic life. There were the errands, those grand opportunities for innocent gossip, those chartered facilities for courtship. Specially the vegetable errands, which generally had to be done in an evening, when the work was all out of the way, and a quarter of an hour more or less was not a matter of life and death. Bessie always went for the vegetables to old Ben Royland's garden, about half a mile down the St. Olave's road, because, as she said, they were sure to be fresh there, and you knew what you were getting. Also, and chiefly, because in the quiet summer evenings, when the Duke's yard was closed, young Roy might generally be found weeding his father's turnips, or hoeing the potatoes, or tying up the roses which clambered in such rank luxuriance all along the hedge, and quite over into the haling bank road. Perhaps, after all, though of course she wouldn't have confessed such a thing for the world, that was the real reason why Bessie always went there for the vegetables.

Poor Bessie ! poor Roy ! what would the end of

the matter be? He loving her very much, but quite too proud to tell her so, because he could not afford to marry for such a long time; she counting him up on her fingers along with the rest of them, Alick, the tall footman, Peter Monk, Roy. Roy always last. Would they marry and be happy ever afterwards, as the story-books say? Or would she, for the sake of the new bonnets—and Bessie was so fond of a little bit of dress—take up with Peter Monk, the low-browed, black-a-vised man, that nobody knew anything about? Or would she, the beauty of youth overpassed, its freshness faded, live out a long, weary, lonely life, mourning for the love she had prized too lightly?

We shall see. However, that was just how things were at Meadowthorpe, the September before the new steward came. And now to go back again to the little Scotch lintie, in its gilded cage at the Aspens.

CHAPTER X.



MISS HEPZIBAH worked on steadily at her pet plan, which was, to make a woman of Janita Raeburn.

And, to tell the truth, the task was harder than she expected. Not that the young girl was stupid or fretful or rebellious. Miss Ruthven could not charge her niece with any of these grievous defects. As the Professor said, she had an admirable phrenological development, good abilities, reflective powers quite out of the ordinary class—no difficulty in making her comprehend the propositions in Euclid, or understand why jelly must not be allowed to go beyond the boiling point. Still——

The material was different to what Miss Hepzibah expected. You might as well try to make a

linsey apron out of a cambric handkerchief, as turn Janita into such a woman as her aunt wished her to become. But the Professor's sister was not easily to be baffled, much less would she acknowledge herself beaten in any task which she had laid out. And so she persevered.

Miss Hepzibah had a peculiar theory of management. She did not exactly adhere to the old proverb, "If you want a thing doing, do it yourself," but she acted upon the principle that if you want a thing doing you must fidget until it is done, and in the end do half of it yourself. A principle which, as most people learn by painful experience, does not conduce to home peace.

Thus half Miss Hepzibah's time was spent in worreting after other people and explaining their work, and seeing that they did it as they were told to do it; and after all it never got done to her own satisfaction. If the dingy old dining-room had to be cleaned, she sent for Bessie, and told her so, with particular instructions how it was to be done; to which instructions Bessie listened attentively, curtsying at proper intervals. When they were finished she would recommence at the end, and repeat the whole backwards. Then she would

dip into the middle, and work her way to both ends in succession. After that, when the "instructions" had got into a hopeless tangle, and the acutest intellect would be puzzled to know whether Miss Hepzibah intended the paper to be taken up and shaken, or the carpet rubbed with bread-crumbs, or the curtains polished with furniture paste, and the table renovated with a coat of whitewash, she would say, "Now you are quite sure you understand, Bessie?" To which poor Bessie dropped another curtsey, and promised to do her best. But hardly had she got back to the kitchen before the dining-room bell would ring again, and Miss Hepzibah would add a few more instructions, finishing up with—

"Now, Bessie, you are quite sure you understand, and you will do it *exactly* as I have said, and be sure you remember that, &c., &c. There, I don't think I have anything more to say."

But something always did strike her afterwards, and putting her head in at the kitchen door, she would discharge a final cannonade of instructions, which left matters enveloped in a denser cloud of smoke than ever.

This was Miss Hepzibah's theory and practice

of domestic management. And upon this principle she proceeded to the training of her niece. Instead of giving her a few broad general rules, and leaving these to work out their own result, she was "at her" from morning to night with doses of good advice and drops of prudent counsel. It was, "Jane, child, you ought to do this;" "Jane, child, you must not forget to attend to that;" "Jane, child, when I was a young girl, we were taught to do so," until poor Janita's patience wore out, and she became regularly nervous.

This at least was part of the training. But another bright idea struck Miss Hepzibah.

There were three young ladies in Gentility Square, of whom one has already been mentioned. Called young, at least, by courtesy, though it was difficult to believe that the Misses Narrowby had ever shared in the freshness, and mischievousness, and general naughtiness and affectionateness of youth. Mrs. Narrowby was a very methodical woman. She had brought up her daughters by a scheme. She apportioned certain hours to certain employments, and these hours were never to be infringed upon. In process of time, the young ladies got so wedded to their scheme, or rather they

got so dependent on the artificial support which it afforded, that when they were no longer school girls, it was still retained, and their whole life squared by it. They would get up and put away their fancy work in the middle of a stitch, because the hour for walking exercise had arrived. They would turn back at the prettiest part of a walk, if the church clock, striking ten, warned them that it was time to settle down to the diet of useful reading; or they would break off half way through a chapter, at the most interesting part of a story, to obey the regulation which enforced an hour's spell of plain sewing, as per scheme.

Miss Hepzibah thought this was beautiful. She had no higher ambition than that her niece should grow up like the Misses Narrowby, precise, methodical, systematic. Accordingly, after due consultation with the Professor, a scheme was prepared similar to that which had been found so efficacious in the Gable-house system of education. It was copied out in clear, legible round-hand, and hung up in Janita's room, just over the place where the shepherd and the shepherdess had been so long trying to kiss each other. The contents ran somewhat after this fashion :—

“Eight to nine, domestic exercises; nine to ten, breakfast and judicious reading; ten to eleven, plain sewing; eleven to twelve, practice of the accomplishments; twelve to one, household avocations; one to two, recreation and walking exercise; two to three, dinner and useful conversation; three to five, plain work and judicious reading; five to six, practice of the accomplishments; six to seven, tea and recreation; seven to nine, correspondence, plain work, and domestic miscellanies.”

This was Monday's scheme. The remaining days of the week were disposed of in the same way, only ringing changes from one set of occupations to another, which made the whole more difficult to be remembered.

Janita was to learn the scheme by heart, and then squeeze herself into it, body, soul, and spirit, for the remaining term of her natural life, or, at least, until such time as Miss Hepzibah should judge the woman-making process complete.

But a difficulty arose. Judicious reading was prescribed twice a day, and Janita had no judicious reading. Miss Hepzibah looked over the slender stock of literature which her niece had brought from Inverallan. It was frivolous to a degree.

Two or three volumes of Scotch ballads ; Mrs. Browning's Poems, a parting gift from Maggie Home ; Shakespeare, from Doctor Home himself—shocking that a minister should encourage such tastes in a young person of nineteen ; Schiller's Plays, translated from the German ; a volume of essays by Carlyle ; Novels by Goethe. Novels were altogether too dangerous, so Miss Hepzibah took them into her own custody. Then an eighteen-penny edition of the American poets. That was all. Rubbish, nothing but rubbish, as the worthy lady said when she had looked through them. Nothing practical. She would like to know what sort of a woman could be built together out of such material as that. And then Miss Hepzibah thought for the one hundred and fiftieth time, what a blessing it was that she had had fortitude enough to rescue her niece from the mire and clay of Inverallan training, and place her feet upon such a foundation of judicious practical wisdom as would be put under them at the Aspens.

But the reading. That must be attended to. The Professor's library was chiefly mathematical and psychological, not judicious at all for a young person of nineteen. And Miss Hepzibah's literary

possessions were, for the most part, in manuscript, consisting of volumes of recipes, classified under the heads of cookery, medicine, and miscellanies. Useful, very, to a certain extent, but not everything that could be wished. So she sent to St. Olave's for a list of works suitable for young people, and, having marked off the titles of those which seemed most suggestive of solid food, ordered them from her bookseller.

In due time, a large parcel arrived at the Aspens. It was brought into the dining-room, as Janita, under her aunt's direction, was engaged upon the plain-sewing department of the scheme.

"Jane, child," said Miss Hepzibah, laying her hand solemnly upon the huge package, and speaking with the slow, measured tones of one who is enunciating a weighty moral maxim, "Jane, child, I have great pleasure in presenting you with these books for your hours of judicious reading. They have been selected under my own superintendence, and I trust the diligent perusal of them will tend to foster in your mind those tempers and dispositions which are essential to female excellence. You will, of course, not meddle with the books until the recreation-hour arrives."

Janita's eyes sparkled, notwithstanding this ponderous prologue. The parcel looked so like those quarterly relays of literature, which used to be sent from Edinburgh to Inverallan Manse, and which furnished so many evenings of quiet amusement. Oh, for the recreation hour to arrive! Never had plain-work appeared so tedious, or Miss Hepzibah's judicious observations so interminable. At last the clock struck. Janita stuffed her work promiscuously into the basket, but her aunt's eyes were upon her, and she had to take it out again, and fold it up with mathematical correctness. Then she tugged the parcel into her own room, where, unripping the cover, she let the contents tumble out in glorious confusion upon the floor.

For awhile it was enough to see them. Such pretty binding!—purple, crimson, blue, scarlet, green, with gilt backs, gilt edges, gilt sides—quite a sheen of gilding in the sober little room! And when Janita half-shut her eyes, and looked at them through her long eye-lashes, the colours all blended together in one beautiful glow, like the stained-glass of a cathedral window. How gay those empty book-shelves should look by and by—unless,

which was most likely, Aunt Hepzibah compelled her to put brown-paper covers upon her new treasures. And what store of precious thoughts must be lurking within those gilded portals, ready to open at her bidding and yield her all their wealth.

But time was passing. Already Janita had idled away half her recreation-hour in admiring the backs of her new books. Now she began to make acquaintance with their contents. The first was bound like Willie Home's copy of Wordsworth, just the same size and thickness, too. Janita opened it, expecting to fall at once upon that sweetest of all sweet songs, "The Pet Lamb," or the pretty verses she had learned so long ago in Inverallan Churchyard, "We are Seven;" or perhaps, that little bit about Lucy—

"A violet by a mossy stone,
Half hidden from the eye."

Nothing of the sort. It was not Wordsworth's poems at all, but "A Guide to Female Excellence, with Hints on Dress, Behaviour to the Opposite Sex, Temper, Deportment, and Choice of Friends. Addressed to Young People by a Maiden Lady."

"Useless," said Janita to herself. "I know how to dress so as to look pretty, at least Willie Home always told me so, and he had very good taste. And as for behaviour to the opposite sex, there seems to be no opposite sex here to behave to in any sort of way. I have not shaken hands with a gentleman since I came, except Uncle Jabez. And then about temper; well, I am not good-tempered, I know that, but I don't think reading books will make me any better. It never did yet, at any rate."

And with that she tumbled the Maiden-lady's gilt-edged counsels on one side.

The next volume was bound in pale blue. It had an elegant steel-engraved frontispiece, representing a very, very pretty young lady with long ringlets, sitting on a sofa. Near her stood a gentleman, who appeared to be on the point of throwing himself at her feet. There were the usual accessories—a vase of flowers, a grand mirror, a great deal of drapery, and an open window, looking over a lovely landscape. That *must* be a story, most likely a love-story too. Janita had a genuine girlish fondness for romance, and so she dipped at once into the end chapter, expecting to

find the heroine made happy beneath a Honiton-lace veil and bridal-wreath. But great was her disappointment. The end chapter was about presiding at a tea-table with propriety; how you ought to pour the tea into the cups, and at what intervals to replenish your pot. Turning back to the title-page, it proved "Hints to Young Ladies on Domestic Duties." Janita threw that down too. She was beginning to feel a little bit spiteful.

But that pretty volume in crimson, a wee thing no bigger than the palm of her hand, with gilt flowers twining about all over the back of it. Surely that was something interesting. It must be an "Affection's Gift," or a "Friendship's Offering," or a "Chaplet of Flowers," or a "Garland of Sweets," or something of that kind; just the very thing to slip into her pocket when she was going for a walk down by the haling bank road, or beneath the rustling elms of Meadowthorpe lane. No; the little book with gilt flowers twining all over the back of it, was a diamond edition of "Hannah More's Serious Advice to the Young." And the next was "Whispers," and the next "Counsels," and the next "Hints,"

and the next "Admonitions to Young Ladies;" and after them came the "Young Lady's Friend," and the "Young Lady's Companion,"—Janita thought she knew of a very nice Companion already, up in Inverallan—and the "Young Lady's Monitor," and last of all, at the very bottom of the parcel, a sober, substantial, stout-elderly-female-sort of book, bound in brown, with no gilt at all, which proved to be "The Duties and Responsibilities of the Female sex, Considered in a Series of Letters to Young People."

Nothing more after that. Janita had no idea that it was such a very, *very* serious thing to be a woman; that young people needed such a fearful number of guide posts and tramways to keep them going along in the right direction. There she sat in the midst of this tide of feminine literature, as helpless and almost as distressed as Miss Hepzibah had been when beset by the sand-puddles of the Whitecliffe coast. It was too bad. She could have cried. Nay, one or two little tears did drop right upon the middle of the "Guide to Female Excellence," making such an ugly stain upon its beautiful red cover. More might have followed and more, for showers of that kind had been fre-

quent since Janita came to Meadowthorpe. But just then Miss Hepzibah's voice was heard ringing up the staircase.

"Jane, child ! Jane ! Jane ! What *is* the girl doing ? Ten minutes past one, and not set off for the walking exercise. Dear me, dear, this will never do, it won't, indeed ! Jane, child ! Jane !"

Janita huddled her Helps, and Hints, and Whispers back again into the brown paper parcel, and for once blessed the scheme which gave her a chance of walking down her disappointment.

CHAPTER XI.



THE first fortnight of Janita's residence at the Aspens, during which, as Miss Hepzibah expressed it, she was "tantling about," learning to accommodate herself to the house, and the ways of its inmates, had been dreary enough; but it was a rosy dream, a perfect holiday-season of rest and quietness compared with the life she led when the scheme came fairly into operation. Morning, noon, and night, her aunt's shrill voice was sounding through the house. "Jane, child! Jane! time for the judicious reading." "Jane, child! the clock has struck, you must come to your plain sewing." "Jane, child! Jane! dear me, where *can* the girl have got to? a quarter past twelve, and the domestic avocations not begun yet!" "Jane, child! you have been at your

recreation ten minutes too long; when *shall* I teach you punctuality? Oh, dear! when I was a girl!" &c.

And Janita, quivering in every nerve, could have shrieked out loud, or burst into a flood of hysteric tears. Indeed, she often had recourse to the tears, but it was always during relaxation time, and then she used to wash her face, and come down to the plain sewing, or the useful reading, just as usual, so that no one knew anything about it.

And yet Aunt Hepzibah was not unkind; far from it. She had the fullest conviction that in everything she was acting the part of a mother to the young girl whom she had taken under her care. She had her own standard of womanhood, hard, strong, practical; and up to this standard, nothing short of this, she was determined to bring her niece. As yet—and Janita had been more than a month at the Aspens—her efforts had failed. But, like many other energetic people, the more she did not succeed, the more she kept on trying. There was no reason *why* she should not succeed, none, at least, that she could perceive. The same machinery which had brought Mrs. Narrowby's

daughters to such a pitch of female excellence, was in full working order at the Aspens. Janita's bookshelves groaned beneath volumes of judicious reading. Every hour of the day had its own appointed task. Twice a week, instead of recreation, her niece went to the village day-school to hear the children say their tables; once a fortnight, instead of walking exercise, she took her tracts round; and every Sunday, under Mr. Mabury's superintendence, she taught a class of girls the Church catechism. Could anything be more perfect than a scheme like this? What could be wanted, except the motive power to move the machinery to some useful result?

Which motive power never came. Miss Hepzibah forgot, or rather she could never by any process of reasoning be made to understand, that the only true management is that which touches the heart; that kind words, tender looks, loving caresses, go further to mould some characters than the most faultless maxims, or the profoundest schemes that were ever invented. But, of course, it was no use telling Miss Hepzibah this. Even if the Professor had had tact enough to see that poor Janita was being managed to death—which he

had not—he might have talked until doomsday before his sister would have relaxed a single regulation, or altered by a hairsbreadth the scheme which had been so carefully elaborated. The person had yet to be born who could convince Hepzibah Ruthven that a plan of hers, if it failed at all, failed from any inefficiency of hers in the working of it.

There was a trifling defect in Miss Ruthven's mental anatomy. She was destitute of what is generally called the emotional nature, meaning by that term the part of us which loves and sympathises. This little oversight on the part of Providence had not hitherto interfered materially with the good lady's personal convenience. She got through life very comfortably, without love or sympathy, or anything of that sort. Certainly one or two attacks had been made upon her affections a long time ago ; at least they were ostensibly aimed at her affections ; but Miss Hepzibah inferred, and very wisely too, that the shaft was intended to reach her funded property. And so the marksman met with a warm reception—a very warm reception ; so warm that its fame spread far and wide, and ever since, our worthy friend had

been left in undisturbed possession of her charms, both personal and monetary.

So having never felt the want of love herself, she ignored its claims in others. She had a profound contempt for any affection, save that which manifested itself in cooking and linen-mending and housekeeping. She could understand how a woman who loved her husband or her brother very much should take delight in preparing good dinners for him, and setting his buttons on, and making him new sets of shirts periodically, and looking after his general comfort in a brisk practical way. That was plain enough. But how love could show itself in any other way; how the loved one's fireside-place, the very ground upon which he had trodden, should be sacred; how his absence could make a blank which none other could fill; how the mere consciousness of his presence should in itself be happiness complete; *that* Miss Hepzibah could not understand. And not understanding it, she would not believe it.

Then, as for Janita wanting companionship, as the Professor had once hinted in a vague, frightened sort of way, that was clearly all stuff and nonsense. What did people want companionship for, she

should like to know, so long as they had plenty to do? Look at herself now, what companionship did she want? She never went out gossiping in an evening, never wanted to talk about her feelings, or "unbosom herself," as the phrase goes, or seek communion with some kindred spirit. And if she, a grown up and fully developed woman, could do without companionship, why, it was only reasonable to suppose that a child like Janita, who had no cares to vex her, no housekeeping to worry after, no servants to manage, no anything, in fact, to disturb the quiet of her life, ought to be quite content, and grateful that the lines had fallen to her in such pleasant places.

Thus Miss Hepzibah said to the Professor in that hard, matter-of-fact voice of hers. But she forgot that if she had the care of a house upon her hands, she had also the pleasing feeling of authority, the consciousness of headship and control; whereas Janita had nothing of this. Hers was the mere task-work of a day labourer, without aim, without responsibility of any kind, without even the poor motive of a day labourer, for Janita's toil brought no wages. Miss Hepzibah did not consider it wise for young people to have money at their command.

It produced thriftlessness and extravagance. And therefore she supplied her niece with what she thought the requisite feminine belongings, from pins to bonnets and dresses; so that when the little store of Inverallan cash was expended, Janita had not a sixpence to call her own.

And so the time kept wearing on. Janita worked patiently at the treadmill in which her aunt had placed her; learned the scheme by heart, and stuck to it as religiously as she could. True, her cheeks began to get very thin; the dimples had quite gone away, and the rosy flush which used to be there had dwindled down to a little pink spot on either side. And into her dark eyes, too, there had come the weary, spiritless look of those who shed many tears. But those about her did not notice this.

Except perhaps Bessie Ashton, the housemaid. Bessie was not exactly nervous, but she knew what it was to quiver under the lash of Miss Hepzibah's tongue, and to quail before those hard black eyes that had neither love nor sweetness in them. And she saw what no one else did, that the poor girl's life was getting worn out of her little by little. But of course it was no business of hers to say any-

thing. Servants were not expected to make remarks about what they saw. Miss Jane, bless her, might have someone in Scotland she was fretting after. She knew very well how *she* should feel if she was taken away to a strange place from—well, away from——.

And just then that low whistle came carolling up from the Duke's-yard end of the village, and Bessie flew to the gable window in time to get a glimpse of Roy's canvas cap and light curls through the thick, hammered glass. No, she was sure she should not like to leave Meadowthorpe; there were a great many people in Meadowthorpe she liked very much, and perhaps there might be somebody at that Scotch place, she could not remember its name, where Miss Jane—bless her!—had come from.

Bessie did what she could, though. She dusted Janita's room with extra care; she shook up her bed twice as vigorously as Miss Hepzibah's. She put a geranium, now and then—no matter where it came from—in the little glass vase which stood upon the dressing-table; and when she knelt down in her white-washed attic night after night to say her prayers, she added a petition to "bless Miss

Jane, and make her happy." Bessie did it all out of good will, pure kindness of heart ; not knowing that perhaps by and by, in her own great sorrow, she, too, might stand in need of a kind word, a loving look.

Poor Janita ! How she pined after the old Inverallan life, with its wholesome ignorance of schemes and methods. How she longed for a race up the hill-side with swift-footed Agnes, or one of those firelight readings in the study with Willie Home. But she scarcely dare think of Willie since that morning, a week or two ago, when Miss Hepzibah had put her through such a catechism of questions about him ; his age, his appearance, his character, his prospects ; finishing up with a great many cautions against allowing her affections to become entangled, or fixing them upon unprofitable objects. Oh, if only Uncle Jabez had never taken that trip into Scotland !—or if fate had never brought him to Inverallan !—or if he had never seen her at church !—or if not one of that chain of circumstances had happened which ended in her being plucked away from the dear Manse home, and pinned down where nobody loved her, away from the purple moorlands, and the wimpling

burnie, and the quiet loch with its fern islands and heathery banks !”

But it was too late. Here she was, amongst the flats and fens ; not a mountain anywhere, not even a hill ; where the dykes were too lazy to get up a ripple on their own responsibility, and the windmills had scarcely energy enough to turn their arms round for an hour together. And yet, dreary as the country was, Janita thought she could have borne with that, if only Aunt Hepzibah would have let her alone a little more, if only she would have given her some work to do, and then left her to do it in her own way. But Miss Hepzibah had no notion of letting people do things in their own way. At the Aspens, there was but one way of doing anything, and that was the way Miss Hepzibah chose to do it. If she gave Janita a shirt-sleeve to make for Uncle Jabez, she was at her a dozen times in an hour with cautions not to put her stitches too near together or too far apart, not to make the gusset too narrow or too wide, not to make the button-holes too large, or the gathers too small. And one would really have thought that the safety of her soul depended upon doing the stitching of the wrist-band according to rule, two threads back-

ward and two forward, neither more nor less. Then, when the domestic avocations were in operation, and Janita had a pudding to make, Miss Hepzibah was at her elbow throughout the process, helping her to dole out the sugar, stone the raisins, or beat the eggs, confusing her with countless cautions and suggestions, and, after all, half making the pudding herself; so that for any real help she had afforded her aunt, Janita felt she might as well have been racing up and down the garden. But that was Miss Hepzibah's theory of domestic management, and you might as well try to move St. Olave's cathedral as convince her that it was not the best possible theory.

The scheme went on triumphantly for about six weeks. Then it received its first check in the shape of an invitation for Janita to join her aunt in the monthly working-party, which was to be held in a few days at Gablehouse.

Miss Hepzibah rather liked that working-party. It was almost the only social opportunity that she really did enjoy. For going out to tea, in a general way, where you had to put on your best dress and white gloves, and sit for three, four, or five hours with your hands in your lap, was a performance she did

not relish at all. But the working-parties were sensible, and she felt that she was doing her duty at them, and so she always went. Perhaps, also, there might be a sort of affinity between her own character and the webs of calico, stout, strong, unbleached, which were there made into garments for the natives of interior Africa; or perhaps it was the freedom of speech which was allowed, and Miss Hepzibah dearly loved speaking her mind out; or perhaps it was the green tea which Mrs. Narrowby used to get direct and unadulterated from her merchant brother in China. But however that might be, Miss Hepzibah's false front and best black lace cap never failed to take their place in the Gable-house drawing-room at half-past three o'clock on the first Monday in the month.

She rather demurred about letting Janita go. Young people, after all, were best at home. It might give the child a taste for visiting. It might distract her mind from due attention to the scheme. But Janita did not seem very anxious about it. She did not plead to go. That would have settled the matter at once, and afforded an opportunity for wholesome discipline by leaving her at home. At last, however, Miss Hepzibah

decided in favour of the invitation, and after making her niece read through the department chapter of the "Whispers to Young Ladies," and the hints on behaviour to members of the opposite sex, at the end of the "Female Guide," and after firing at her a perfect cannonade of good advice, which the young girl listened to demurely enough, they both set off to Mrs. Narrowby's periodical diet of plain-work.

Which diet of plain-work, or rather the events towards which it led, had no small influence on Janita Raeburn's future life.

CHAPTER XII.



R. NARROWBY was the Duke's architect. His letters were always addressed, Ralph Narrowby, Esq. Mrs. Narrowby would have been very much displeased if envelopes bearing any other superscription had ever found their way into her husband's private room of business. Mr. Narrowby lived in a peculiar-looking house, of his own devising, at the north end of Gentility Square. Gablehouse was the proper name of the architect's residence, but certain evil-disposed persons, who enjoyed having a joke at their neighbours' expense, used to call it Gabblehouse, from the amount of gossip—purely innocent gossip, of course—which oozed out, from time to time, in its elegantly-furnished drawing-room. But the people who called Mr. Narrowby's residence Gabble-

house, were ill-mannered people—people of no refinement or education, and you are not obliged to believe that the inuendo contained so much as a particle of truth.

Mrs. Narrowby was a tall, stout woman, of dignified and slightly repelling presence. She always had her head drawn far back into her shoulders, like a cat when it is in a bad temper. She also had a peculiar way of walking up the church aisle on a Sunday, a way which, to say the least of it, was quite out of keeping with the sentiments of the General Confession, though no one in Mr. Mabury's parish pronounced that confession with more clearness and distinctness than the architect's lady.

For the rest, Mrs. Narrowby was a very lady-like person. Charitable, too; except to the failings of other people. She gave away coals and flannel-petticoats at Christmas, in return for which she expected the parishioners who received them, to curtsey very low to her all the year round. Accordingly they did curtsey very low to her. No one in the parish was curtsied to more lowlily than Mrs. Narrowby.

The family at Gablehouse consisted of a son,

employed in his father's office, and three daughters, unmarried. But those three Miss Narrowbys must be particularised. They were such very well-conducted young ladies—so overflowing with the proprieties of life—such perfect specimens of the admirable results of home-training.

Long ago there lived in Yorkshire a lady who was remarkable for the excellence of her cheese-cakes. No one, in all the country round, made such cheese-cakes, for size and flavour and general excellence. They were always exactly alike, made after the same receipt, baked the same length of time; only she had a little variety in the shape of the tins. And when her friends came to have tea with her, and the table, in pursuance of the good old Yorkshire custom, was spread with sweets of every kind, she would say,

“Now, will you take a round cheese-cake, or a square one, or a diamond-shaped one?”

Just as if it was of the slightest consequence which they took, since all were the same.

The Misses Narrowby were something like Mrs. Yorkshire's cheese-cakes, excepting richness of flavour. They were made after the same receipt, mixed with the same ingredients, put together in

the same quantities, cooked for the same length of time, producing, of course, the same result. The only difference was, a slight variation in external form. Miss Narrowby was square, angular, precise. Miss Julia was round and dumpy. Miss Selina inclined to elegance, and might, therefore, be described as diamond-shaped. In every other respect they matched exactly. They dressed alike, spoke alike, thought alike, had the same preferences, the same aversions. They lived after the same scheme, had the same hopes, desires, and aims, walked along the same beaten track, which was the straight and narrow one, marked out by time-honoured usage, as the best for unmarried daughters at home. Enough for the present concerning the Gablehouse young ladies.

Mrs. Narrowby considered herself in the forefront of the parish, as regarded social position. True, there were the Misses Vere Aubrey, whose pedigree was a trifle longer than her own, and embraced a few more titled names in its roll. But then the pedigree of the Misses Vere Aubrey was everything to them. They could boast of neither money nor husbands to support their position. They were reduced to the pitiful shift of hanging

up an old wide-awake in the back passage, to the intent that stray tramps coming—fruitlessly enough—to beg for spare halfpence, might be deluded into the belief that Aubrey Lodge contained something in the shape of a man. Mrs. Narrowby, with a butler, a footman, a gardener, and a thousand a year, smiled at the bare idea of the Misses Vere Aubrey claiming precedence over *her*. Then there was Mrs. Macturk, the widow of the rich India merchant. Mrs. Macturk had plenty of money, but no one knew who her grandfather was, and her “h’s” were terribly misplaced sometimes. The less said about Mrs. Macturk’s position, the better. Miss Ruthven, too, was very well connected, belonged to an old and highly respectable Scottish family, had considerable private means, and if her personal qualifications had equalled those of purse and pedigree, would have been no mean rival to the claims of Gablehouse. But then Miss Hepzibah Ruthven was so extremely—what should Mrs. Narrowby call it? she really did not wish to be severe upon any one in the parish, but Miss Hepzibah was so very fantastic and unladylike in her deportment, that although she might be, and undoubtedly was, much respected

by a certain class, still, she could never aspire to rank herself side by side with the aristocracy of the village. As for Miss Alwyne, she also was an unprotected female, and as such could not trench upon Mrs. Narrowby's position, fenced in as it was by a husband and four children, who, if not possessed of shining gifts, were everything that could be wished for in point of conduct and propriety. And everyone knew that Dr. Maguire had only married his wife for her pretty face; and the lawyer's lady was a confirmed invalid, who took no place in society at all. There was only Mrs. Mabury left. But the clergyman in a country parish, like the king in chess, goes for nothing; he cannot be touched. Therefore, on the whole, Mrs. Narrowby might consider herself supreme. And she did so.

The social construction of the Meadowthorpe working-parties was peculiar. Of the fifteen or twenty ladies who assembled month after month in Mrs. Narrowby's drawing-room, not more than half condescended to recognise each other when they met in the village street. Miss Vere Aubrey, whose ancestors came in with the Conqueror, had no objection to sit side by side with Miss Brad-

shaw, whose father died a year or two ago, and left her a nice little property of one or two hundred a year, amassed in the linen drapery business ; and, if need be, she would pass Miss Bradshaw the cotton reels, or answer a civil question about a pinafore pattern, or permit the linen-draper's daughter to take the length of a little frock, preparatory to the running of tucks. But Miss Vere Aubrey, whose ancestors came in with the Conqueror, had a deeply-rooted and perfectly natural objection to take notice of Miss Bradshaw, whose father amassed a fortune in the linen-drapery business, if they met in the street ; and therefore the said Miss Vere Aubrey wisely declined doing so. You will not, I am sure, think of blaming her on that account. Neither, because Mrs. Macturk, relict of the rich Indian merchant of that name, kindly inquired across the room concerning the welfare of Mrs. Brown's little baby, who had begun to cut his teeth—Mrs. Brown was the grocer's wife,—did such a manifestation of kindly feeling at all justify Mrs. Brown in stretching out her drab-coloured cotton glove to grasp Mrs. Macturk's lavender kid, when they passed each other in Gentility Square. Mrs. Brown *had* once taken

that liberty, soon after her husband commenced business on his own account, but Mrs. Macturk was happy to say she had succeeded in convincing the grocer's wife of its impropriety. People of that class, you know, are so very apt to step out of their place.

Again; Mrs. Crumpet, the Canon's widow, who, since her husband's preferment to the church above, had lived in that elegant little villa on the St. Olave's road, and who at stated seasons carried her cathedralesque person into Mrs. Narrowby's drawing-room, to assist in stitching an unbleached calico sleeve for some benighted Hottentot or South Sea islander—Mrs. Canon Crumpet, I say, might, if she thought proper, make a remark on the origin and prospects of the African mission to Miss Green, the national schoolmaster's sister, who was stitching a corresponding sleeve for the same garment; or if Mrs. Crumpet, the Canon's widow, misplaced her scissors, and Miss Green, the national schoolmaster's sister, found them for her, Mrs. Crumpet would receive them with the gracefulness of bows—those cathedral people were always so perfectly well bred—but that was no reason why Miss Green, the national schoolmaster's sister,

should presume to show all her pretty white teeth in a smile of recognition, next time she met Mrs. Crumpet, the Canon's widow, near that elegant villa on the St. Olave's road. And if Miss Green had so far forgotten social morality as to venture upon such a proceeding, the iciest of glances from Mrs. Crumpet's steel grey eyes would soon have brought her to a sense of its enormity.

So that the social constitution of Mrs. Narrowby's working-party was something like the famous Egyptian mummy, which crumbled to pieces as soon as it was brought into the open air.

You perceive the reasonableness of these little niceties of social etiquette. I am sure you do. At least, I hope you do, because, if not, it is quite out of my power to explain it. I merely tell you that this is the way things were done at Meadowthorpe, and I take it for granted that your unbounded faith in modern conventions will embrace it as the right way.

Of course this state of things involved many little heartburnings, especially amongst those members of the working-party who were neither Canons' widows, nor relicts of Indian merchants,

nor descendants of Norman barons who came over with the Conqueror. Mrs. Brown and Miss Green and Miss Bradshaw could not at all understand why, after being addressed by Mr. Mabury from the pulpit, in his yearly mission sermon, as "co-partners," and "faithful handmaids," and committed by him to Divine protection at the close of the working-party, as "fellow-helpers in the great work of evangelisation," Mrs. Canon Crumpet should sail past them in the street as if she had never seen them before, looking straight forward with those keen, steel, grey eyes of hers; or why Mrs. Macturk should keep her lavender kids buried in the deepest recesses of her ermine muff, instead of extending them for a friendly shake with the Lisle thread of a "co-partner," or "faithful handmaid;" or why Mrs. Narrowby, meeting her humbler colleagues in Gentility Square, should eye them as if they were Jews, Turks, and infidels, nay, worse, for in that case the female head of the Gablehouse establishment would most likely have offered them a tract. And Miss Green, the national schoolmaster's sister, who came out of Lancashire, where the people have a great notion of speaking their own minds, said

boldly that, for her part, she thought such exclusiveness was neither more nor less than ridiculous. And Miss Bradshaw, who had been born and bred in Meadowthorpe, and therefore was more in bondage to its spirit, said that it wasn't her place to sit in judgment, but she did think that if Dorcas had countenanced that sort of thing, she would not have been so popular amongst the humbler class at Joppa. And Mrs. Brown, the grocer's wife, gave it as her opinion that such divisions amongst professing christians were unbecoming and heathenish, and that if Mrs. Narrowby did not move to her next time they met, she had quite made up her mind to have her name taken off the books. "But you know," as Mrs. Narrowby said, and all well-bred professing Christians of the upper class will quite agree with her, "it was such a nuisance to have to move to all those people in the street." And if you had lived at Meadowthorpe you would have done the same, would you not?

Miss Hepzibah and Janita went very early to Gablehouse. Miss Hepzibah did so because it gave her the opportunity of choosing her work. She liked something that was not very particular, a stout calico sleeve, or a gingham pinafore, or a

linsey apron, something that she need not give her whole mind to, but might reserve a little bit for attention to conversation. Having selected a suitable article, she whispered a few words to Miss Narrowby, who replied in the same audible whisper—"Oh! indeed, very strange!" and immediately brought Janita a straightforward piece of hemming, tacked down as if for a child of ten years old. From which Janita inferred that her aunt had been saying something about her deficiencies as a sempstress, and she felt like going into a bad temper.

No one was in the room when they arrived, except the ladies of the house. By and by Mrs Macturk came, in her green moire antique, and bird of paradise bonnet. Most of the working-party ladies took off their bonnets, but Mrs. Macturk's was so elegant that it seemed a pity not to keep it before the public as much as possible. Then came Miss Bradshaw and Miss Green, who had evidently put on their best things for the occasion. Then the Misses Vere Aubrey. They wore holland dresses, with no jewellery or anything of the sort, and said good morning to Mrs. Narrowby when they went away, although tea had been handed

round in the interval. But the Misses Vere Aubrey wished to impress the lower social mind with the fact that they dined at seven. After them Mrs. Brown arrived in her best brocade that she wore to church on Sunday, and Mrs. Mabury, the rector's lady, a serene, imperial-looking woman, once elegant, now fast consolidating into corpulence.

It was not the custom to introduce people to each other at the working-parties. That would have involved recognition afterwards, which was objectionable. As Mrs. Narrowby said when one of the lower members asked the name of a new comer—"We meet as fellow-Christians, not as friends. I make it a rule never to introduce at my working-parties. We consider each other as fellow-Christians, met to advance the cause, nothing more."

Whereupon the "fellow-Christian" who had been so put down, felt herself much aggrieved, and thought that the only cause advanced was the cause of exclusiveness. But she did not say so.

Janita sat quietly enough in her corner by the window-curtain. That very unnecessary, and, as she thought, uncharitable remark of Aunt Hep-

zibah's about her want of proficiency in plain work, had put her not exactly into a bad humour, but a silent one. She caught one or two flying whispers, of which she was evidently the subject, from Mrs. Macturk and the Misses Vere Aubrey, who were sitting not far off. "Professor's niece, did I understand you? Raeburn—oh, yes, thank you." However, no one seemed inclined to take much notice of her, except Miss Narrowby, who came across the room to Miss Raeburn's corner, and asked, in a clear, perfectly audible voice, whether she found the work too difficult—a remark which did not tend to develop poor Janita's good temper to any great extent.

When the company had assembled, Mrs. Narrowby began to read. The reading lasted about an hour. Then the upper house separated into little conversational groups, interrupted now and then by a request from the lower house for the loan of scissors, cotton-reels, or patterns, which were passed in dignified silence, as became "fellow-Christians met to advance the cause."

"I wonder if we shall have Miss Alwyne this afternoon," remarked Miss Vere Aubrey, in those stately, aristocratic accents of hers.

Miss Green, the national schoolmaster's sister, thought not, for one of the village people told her that Miss Alwyne had been the whole of the morning with poor old Mrs. Royland, who was thought to be near death. And Miss Green, the national schoolmaster's sister, said as much as this to Miss Vere Aubrey, whose ancestors came in with the Conqueror.

"Oh!" said Miss Vere Aubrey, in a decided, settling sort of voice. And then, recollecting herself, she added, "Thank you," and turning away in an opposite direction from Miss Green, commenced a conversation with Mrs. Narrowby.

But Mrs. Narrowby was engaged with the work-basket, looking out a pinafore-sleeve for Mrs. Macturk.

"Really, Mrs. Macturk, I do not see the sleeve anywhere. I must have misplaced it in preparing the work."

"If you want the fellow-sleeve to the one Mrs. Macturk is doing, I have got it here," said little Mrs. Brown, the grocer's wife, in accents anything but aristocratic. But then you know before little Mrs. Brown was married she had been lady's-maid somewhere.

"I beg pardon," said Mrs. Macturk.

"Oh, dear no, you can have the sleeve. I have done with it now."

"Perhaps then, Miss Ruthven, you would be kind enough to pass it this way."

Miss Hepzibah was a sort of spokeswoman between the upper and lower houses, having sympathies with both, in a manner. So she passed the sleeve "that way," and was politely thanked for it by Mrs. Macturk, who, however, did not even vouchsafe a glance towards the grocer's wife. Upon which Mrs. Brown got very red in the face, and shortly afterwards whispered something to Miss Bradshaw, of which all that could be heard was—

"Ridiculous, ain't it?"

But little difficulties like these will occur sometimes between fellow-Christians and faithful handmaids, especially when the parties do not belong to the same set.

To Janita, who was a keen observer of character, all this by-play was very amusing. The conscious dignity with which the upper house supported its state; the half-suppressed wrath of the lower members who fancied themselves slighted; the high-toned pride with which Miss Vere Aubrey asked

for pins and cotton reels, which had got lost among the commonalty; the attempted indifference with which the "faithful handmaids" in the plebeian department gave them up; Miss Hepzibah's mediations between the two parties—all these things made up a little social drama, which atoned for the absence of more congenial employment.

At six, tea came in; with it Mr. Narrowby, his son Longden, and Mr. Mabury. Their arrival was the signal for putting away work.

To say that the Reverend Eustace Mabury, M.A., of Magdalen College, Oxford, Rector of Meadowthorpe, and Vicar-choral of St. Olaves' cathedral, was a man who lived for the spiritual welfare of his people, and found his highest enjoyment in ministering to their religious interests, would perhaps be venturing beyond the bounds of truth. But Meadowthorpe was in the gift of the Duke of Dykeland, and His Grace and Eustace Mabury were college friends. Moreover, young Mabury's keen intellect and well-stored mind had more than once supplemented the peer's scantier endowments, and saved my lord from coming to grief in his examinations. Therefore—

At any rate, Mr. Mabury was rector of Meadow-

thorpe. And, on the whole, a good rector, too, though the people were wont to nod gently now and then under the influence of his ministrations. For he had a snug little fortune, much of which found its way into the cottages in the shape of soup and blankets; and his wife, though not gifted in the visiting department, could dress with excellent taste, and could conduct a dinner-party with style, and might, therefore, as Miss Vere Aubrey said, be considered an acquisition to the place, in a social point of view.

After chatting for a short time with the ladies, passing off a few little pleasantries on the babies' socks and pinafores, Mr. Mabury entered into conversation with his host concerning the new steward, whose arrival was expected in a few weeks.

Meanwhile, Longden Narrowby had found his way to Janita's corner of the room, having been introduced to her by his sister Selina.

Longden was a refined, elegant, rather cultivated young man. There was that sort of fascination about him which a graceful mind imparts. As regards his personal appearance, he was what is generally called interesting looking. He had

the bright eyes and the hectic flush which so often take their possessors to a premature grave. Also there was that half shy gentleness about his ways which gives such a charm to those in whose characters beauty takes the place of strength. He was very different from the rest of his family. In them the practical everyday virtues predominated. Nature had given him almost an excess of that grace and refinement, of which a little could have been so well spent upon his sisters. He was not strong—either mentally or bodily—not reliable, not profound, not steady and unyielding in his grasp of anything ; but *such* a charming companion.

Janita found this out before she had been in his company ten minutes. He was very fond of poetry, and so was she. It was such a treat to be able once more to talk about Longfellow and Bryant and Mrs. Browning, and to remind each other of favourite little bits ; and to find out, as passage after passage was recalled, how their tastes corresponded. And Longden had read Schiller, too, and could say by heart all the finest pieces out of Wallenstein and William Tell. And he had been in Scotland, not to Inverallan certainly, but to many charming Highland nooks which Janita

knew quite well, and it was so pleasant to talk to him about them all, those glens and ferny water-courses, and heathery moors, and quiet lochs whose banks were all fringed with black pine trees, beneath whose shade the gorse and blue bells grew.

So pleasant, that Janita got quite animated. How could she help it? How could she keep the old bright flash from coming back again to her eyes, and the red to her cheeks, and the quick smile to her lips? Not at all; until looking up, she saw Miss Hepzibah's face turned towards her with an awe-stricken expression, and immediately she began to feel as if she had been doing something very naughty.

But, fortunately, just at that crisis, tea came to a conclusion. Mr. Mabury returned thanks. The members of the lower house put on their bonnets and went home. The Misses Vere Aubrey, too, after saying good morning very impressively to the general company, adjourned to the seven o'clock dinner. The rest remained, being pressed by Mrs. Narrowby to walk round the garden. It was looking very beautiful, the autumn flowers were in such perfection.

By good fortune or good management, certainly not by any contrivance either on her own part or that of Miss Hepzibah, Janita found herself again in company with Longden Narrowby. Most likely it was good management, judging from the conversation which, whilst Longden and Janita, together with diamond-shaped Miss Selina, were sauntering amongst the flower-beds, went forward between Mrs. Narrowby and the rich Indian widow.

"A niece, did I understand you, dear Mrs. Narrowby, of the Professor's?"

"Yes; own niece, or rather great niece. The young lady's mother was own niece to Mr. Ruthven."

"Oh! perfectly well connected, then."

"Perfectly; quite satisfactory in that respect. You know the Ruthvens are a very old Scottish family. She was born at sea."

"No? how romantic! And her father?"

"Dead, I believe, a short time ago. Wild rather, got through his money, but well connected too."

"Indeed; I understood the young lady had property."

"Oh, yes, certainly. Inherits the whole of her uncle's property. I have had that on the *best* authority."

"The whole! dear me! And the Professor must have some hundreds a year."

"Well, yes," and Mrs. Narrowby gave her hand a little wave, as if the property were of no consequence, of no consequence at all. "A nice income, you know, for the girl by and by."


"Very nice. Though, as you say, a few hundreds is not much," and Mrs. Macturk thought of her magnificent annuity. "Still it is—well, yes, a very desirable thing. But, oh! Mrs. Narrowby! do excuse me, your chrysanthemums, how lovely! I must stop."

Whether the conversation was ever resumed, is not of moment. Half an hour later, Miss Hepzibah and her niece stood at the front door of the Gablehouse, cloaked and bonneted. And Mrs. Narrowby was saying in her sweetest, most impressive manner—

"We shall be so exceedingly happy to see Miss Raeburn again. You will allow her, I hope, dear Miss Ruthven, to visit my girls now and then."

And as the Misses Narrowby were such models of female excellence, Miss Ruthven could do nothing but give her consent.

CHAPTER XIII.

EXT day there was elderberry syrup to make, which kept Miss Hepzibah in the still-room most of the morning. And then for Janita there was the judicious reading, and the practice of the accomplishments, and the walking exercise, and the children's multiplication-table to be heard. Then came dinner, then recreation, then two or three callers. So that it was not till late in the afternoon, when the plain-sewing part of the scheme was in action, and Miss Hepzibah, with a half-finished stocking, sat in her accustomed seat by the dining-room fire, that the cloud which had been gathering all day, descended in a gentle rain.

Not a storm, nothing of that sort. At least, not on Miss Hepzibah's part. The occasion was

too important for storming. If the jelly boiled over, or the preserves stuck to the bottom of the pan, or the marmalade turned out stringy, the Professor's sister would rave; but when moral delinquencies had to be reproved, when her sense of feminine propriety had been wounded, Miss Hepzibah was calm as the very Alps themselves.

Janita expected something. She expected it from the awful way in which her aunt's lips were drawn down, and the set, rigid look which was every moment growing sterner and sterner behind those gold-rimmed spectacles. She knew that in some way, how, she could not exactly say, she had broken the moral law; that is, Miss Hepzibah's version of it. Away there at the Manse, nobody would have scolded her; she would have said her prayers at night with a clear conscience. But an Inverallan conscience was of very little use for practical purposes at the Aspens.

"Jane," and Miss Hepzibah might have been reading the burial service, her voice was so chill, "Jane, there is a little matter I wish to mention to you. Scarcely a little matter though, since it involves the very essence of female excellence.

I had hoped that the valuable selection of works suitable for young people, which I put into your hands a short time ago, would have fortified your mind against that frivolity which appears to me to be your besetting sin. I am disappointed to find that the perusal of those works has not prevented you from so far forgetting what is due to the female character, as to indulge in the unseemly conduct of last evening. That conduct was unwomanly ; it was——”

“Aunt, I only talked to young Mr. Narrowby about poetry books, and a little bit about Scotland ; if you mean that, I don't think it was wrong.”

“Jane, when I was your age, I was instructed to be silent in company, and to preserve that modest demeanour which is the supremest ornament of the sex.”

Janita's eyes began to flash ; there was an ominous quiver on her lips. Perhaps she, too, had a little of the desperate Raeburn blood in her. But Miss Hepzibah was too much occupied with her speech to notice anything else.

“Jane, your uncle and I undertook the training of you in order that you might be reclaimed from the pernicious habits which had resulted from

the unrestrained freedom of your Inverallan life. There womanly propriety appears not to have been considered. You err in supposing that the unseemly liberty in which you indulged there, will be tolerated in the bosom of a correct family such as that over which I have the honour to preside."

"Aunt!"

"You will oblige me by preserving silence. Nothing you may bring forward can justify your behaviour last evening. It shocked me; it violated all my ideas of propriety; it——"

What else it did remains a secret. For the bound of Janita's patience was reached at last. The flood-gates were opened, and out poured the torrent of impetuous anger.

"Aunt! Aunt Hepzibah! I wish I had never come to Meadowthorpe! Why did you bring me here? No one asked you. And I was so happy at Inverallan, and they loved me, and they were kind to me. But you pin me down with your schemes and methods—I hate them, I do! I wish I was home again! And I have done nothing wrong. I would do it all over again this very night, if I had the chance, I would. And I——"

But there is no need to say all the rest. When

Janita began her little oration, she was stitching away at a linen wristband ; before she had finished it she was out in the middle of the floor, her work on the ground, her eyes flashing, her forehead knotted up with passion, such as no conscience, be it Inverallan or Meadowthorpe, could in any sort justify.

Miss Hepzibah was confounded. What next? Was ever anything so audacious? And from a child like that !

“Blessings on us !” she ejaculated, as the little fury stood there, stamping her feet on the carpet. And because Miss Hepzibah could really think of nothing else just then, she kept saying it over and over again,

“Blessings on us!”

In her confusion she dropped a stitch off her stocking-heel. Of course it had to be picked up. And when the good lady lifted her head again, to repeat “Blessings on us !” Janita was gone.

Nothing so strange as that had happened at the Aspens for a long time, certainly. There had been one or two breezes with Bessie Ashton, when the poor girl had got worried almost to death with

cautions and reprimands; but never anything to match the little Scotch lassie's tornado of wrath. What was to be done?

Miss Hepzibah Ruthven did not believe in passionate feeling of any kind. Nothing annoyed her so much as the manifestation of emotion. She could not bear to see people cry, it fidgeted her beyond endurance; and as for violent outbursts of anger, she always set them down to a disordered liver, or a very depraved state of the moral sensibilities. Thus, Janita's escapade, which was in reality only the natural outbreak of uncontrollable nervousness, appeared to her in the light of a lamentable dereliction from the path of female propriety. And, as such, she thought it her duty to take advice upon the subject.

There was Miss Alwyne. She was well known in the village as a sensible person, a person of intellectual abilities. Moreover, report said that in her early days she had been a governess. Therefore she might possibly retain some knowledge of the workings of the youthful heart in its most depraved condition. And so to Meadowthorpe Cottage, there and then, Hepzibah Ruthven went.

Miss Alwyne was at work in her parlour, a quiet,

peaceful-looking little room, of which we may have more to say hereafter. She listened patiently to her visitor's long story, a half-perceptible smile coming and going upon her face all the while. The Professor's sister was quite right. Miss Alwyne *did* understand "youthful depravity" of this kind. She knew a little of Janita too. She had studied her face at church. She knew what a restless, eager, unsatisfied nature was moulding the young girl's changeful features, and looking through those dark eyes of hers. And she knew, too, how the quick ardent temperament, impatient of control, rebellious under anything but the gentlest touch, would chafe and quiver beneath that unskilful hand which was trying to force it into an unnatural track.

Miss Hepzibah sketched out her grievances in bold general outline, and then proceeded to details.

"So frightfully deficient in method, dear Miss Alwyne. It really is very trying. The girl almost drives me out of my senses sometimes. I *cannot* teach her punctuality. She *will* take to her duties at wrong times of the day, and be doing plain work when the scheme directs judicious reading, or

domestic avocations when it ought to be walking exercise. And she says she can't sing or draw except when the 'mood,' as she calls it, is upon her. Moods, such nonsense! I never have moods. I really get quite disheartened, Miss Alwyne. I am trying to make a woman of her, but it seems to be no use. I have provided her with a complete library of works suitable for young people, such a mass of useful information as I am sure would furnish any girl's mind for life, and I expect her to write me out a digest of one chapter each day to fix it upon her memory, you know; but——"

And Miss Hepzibah sighed. So did Miss Alwyne—not for the same reason, though. She was silent for some time, and then began in a low, clear voice, as if following out in her own mind some favourite train of thought:

"I sometimes fancy that we should succeed better in the training of girls if we left them more to themselves, instead of besetting them so with guides, and manuals, and hand-books. We cripple them with overmuch help. We stifle them with letterpress until they haven't room for an idea of their own."

"Dear me, Miss Alwyne! Don't you approve

of guides and manuals? Why, the very books I ordered for Jane, because I thought they would brace her mind so. The bookseller at St. Olaves' assured me there was such a demand from the ladies' schools for guides and manuals; so much more sensible, you know, for the youthful mind than poetry and that sort of nonsense. Do you not really think now, Miss Alwyne, that these works are exceedingly suitable for young people?"

"No, Miss Hepzibah, I don't."

"But girls are always brought up by them. The bookseller told me so."

"Very likely. And look at the results of your present system of teaching. Does England turn out nobler women now than she did three hundred years ago, when all these aids, and helps, and whispers, and suggestions were unpublished? Women, I mean, who fulfil more worthily the great purposes of life. Contrast Lady Jane Grey, and Rachel Russell, and many others whose names are not so famous as theirs, with the women of the present day."

"Ah! but Miss Alwyne, those were brilliant exceptions—gifted individuals. Now I am afraid my niece——"

"I don't think they were so very gifted ; but their natures were freer, stronger, more healthily developed. What they did was done from free will, from the promptings of their own hearts, aided by light from above, and not because this book advised it, or that book recommended it, or the other book said it ought to be done."

"Well, what you say sounds reasonable ; it really does."

This was a wonderful admission for Miss Hepzibah to make. A week ago she would never have dreamed of saying such a thing. But Janita's unaccountable ebullition of temper had so scared her, so shaken her faith in the schematic mode of training, that she was ready in despair to admit almost anything.

"But surely," she said, "rules are advisable for young people ; judicious, well selected rules, you know."

"I don't complain of rules, Miss Hepzibah, only we have so many of them. Girls are positively suffocated with rules. They are taught to do everything by rule, from the buying of a bonnet ribbon to the choosing of a husband. Instead of giving them a few leading principles, and

allowing these to produce their own result, they are fenced up with books of good, well-meant advice, all addressed to the practical part of their nature. They are taught how to preside at a tea-table, how to dress themselves properly, how to behave to gentlemen, how to manage their tempers, how to mend, dust, and cook, how to do everything, in fact, that a girl's common sense ought to teach her to find out for herself. And if, after wading through all the books written for their benefit, they have any sort of freshness of mind left, it is a blessing for which they cannot be too thankful."

Poor Miss Hepzibah! her theories were being washed away one by one, like children's sand castles when the tide comes up. But she would not give up everything to Miss Alwyne. Nay, most likely, before to-morrow morning, she would have travelled back again to the old stand-point, and be rooted there as firmly as ever.

"You would fortify a young person's mind with maxims, though, would you not? Sound maxims, you know, like those in the 'Guide to Female Excellence.' That work, Miss Alwyne, is in the fourteenth edition; it *must* be good."

"I would do this. I would try to graft in their hearts those great God-given truths, without which no life can ever win real nobleness. I would try to teach them that the meanest little duty which loving hands can do, comes as a message from heaven, and hides within it, when rightly done, a blessing most sweet and precious. I would teach them that there is nothing servile in a woman's life."

"Exactly so!" cried Miss Hepzibah, triumphantly, "*just* my opinion; and so the scheme devotes a couple of hours every day to domestic avocations. I think it is *so* important for young people to know how to cook. But, poor child! she has no taste for that sort of thing. I'm sure I pity her."

"I would," Miss Alwyn continued, as though not hearing this interruption, "teach her that from the little things which compose a woman's life, she may ever rise to the lofty thoughts which make that life divine; and then away with all your Helps, and Suggestions, and Aids, and Counsels, and Whispers. She will do without them—she will become a true woman, a noble woman; truer and nobler far than a whole bookseller's shop full

of works suitable for young people could ever make her."

"Dear me!" Miss Hepzibah was going to say—"Blessings on us!" but that expression did not seem suitable to Miss Alwyne's presence. "It is a very difficult thing, the building up of a young girl's character. I am sure I take the greatest pains with Jane. I'm at her from morning to night, trying to make her do what is proper."

"Ah! there it is. You talk of building up character, as if character was a thing that could be built up. As if it was a thing to be done by mere hand labour; a good architect, plenty of patience and mortar, and the structure is complete. Now I would rather think of character as a seed that has in it the germs of life. Give it air, light, warmth; then *let it alone*. By and by there will come the tiny stem, then the tender little leaves; still give it air, light, warmth; take your screens and props away, let the sun shine on it and the rain feed it, and presently there will come the beautiful flower, the sweet flower, whose fragrance shall brighten all your life."

Miss Hepzibah *did* say "Blessing on us!" then.

She really could not help it. Miss Alwyne had such very peculiar notions!

That was about all that passed between them.

Miss Hepzibah went home. She took off her bonnet and shawl, gave herself a great shake, called for a bowl of water and cleaned all the downstairs windows. She wanted something to drown her defeat, and she drowned it in that useful, practical way. Some people would have sat down and cried. Miss Hepzibah's plan of cleaning the windows was much better. It answered very well too, for she felt, as she expressed it, "straight again," when they were cleaned.

Only, what was to be done with Janita?

Nothing, just at present. For wisdom quite beyond her own was guiding the young girl's course now. Light would come by and by. It would surely come.

CHAPTER XIV.



THE autumn of that year was long remembered by the Meadowthorpe people as one of the saddest they had ever known. After a brief interval of September sunshine, rain set in again—steady, unceasing rain. No golden October days, no rich November sunsets steeping the clouds in orange and crimson, no crisp hoar frosts turning the leafless branches into glistening sprays of silver and jewelling every little blade of grass with countless diamond sparks. But instead, thick fogs came up from the Meadowthorpe marshes; grey, dank, unwholesome fogs, laden with fever and ague. And as they poured their pestilential miasma into the village, the death-bell began to toll, and graves were dug in the churchyard, and blinds were closely drawn, and tears, weary bitter tears, were

shed as the strong man was smitten down, or the baby face stiffened in its coffin, or the maiden's cheek was kissed by the cold lips of death.

Janita was the first to sicken.

After that passionate outbreak, she rushed away into the garden in her thin shoes, without hat or shawl; and, throwing herself down under the old apple tree upon a bed of rotting, rain-sodden leaves, had begun to cry again. There she lay all the time Aunt Hepzibah was at Miss Alwyne's; past the solid reading hour, past the recreation hour, past the practice of the accomplishments. Ah! it would be a long time before poor Janita would need to practise accomplishments any more, save the accomplishment of patience, which, perhaps, after all, was the one she most needed.

The twilight began to fall, and the grey damp to creep up from Meadowthorpe dyke, but still Janita lay there under the old apple tree. When it grew quite dark she came into the house again, and, having a bad headache, shut herself up in her own little room. Next morning, Miss Hepzibah's voice was heard as usual screaming up the staircase.

"Jane, child, Jane! Dear me, where is the

girl? I wonder if she knows the church clock has struck seven half an hour ago. Jane, Jane, time for the domestic avocations! Never thought of your scheme, I suppose; that is it. Dear me—dear me!”

But the scheme had done its work for the present. Janita's brow was throbbing, her hands burning, alternate fits of heat and shivering passing over her. Something must be the matter. Aunt Hepzibah consulted her receipt book, and decided that it was an incipient “febrile attack.” So she made Janita get up and put her feet in hot water, and then, swathing her in flannels, bundled her back again into bed, and dosed her with sweet nitre and water gruel.

Janita lay there all day. Such a long long day it seemed! She could not think much about anything, her head ached so. And then, as is often the case at the beginning of illness, her memory drifted idly back again to the old times, to the stories *Ilsie* had told her about her mother and the ship *Janita*. How, while the vessel lay becalmed there beneath a tropic sky, the waves lapping at its sides, the summer lightning flashing like a living creature from mast to mast, Mrs.

Raeburn, speaking no word, asking neither for love nor sympathy, would pace the deck with hands tightly clenched, and face that grew more haggard day by day. And how at last it was all over, and the captain read the prayers, and the sailors stood reverently by, whilst a long narrow coffin slipped quietly into the sea. There would be a death, those sailors said. They knew it, for sharks had tracked the vessel many days, and where the sharks came, death came too.

And then she remembered what *Ilsie* had said about *Gavin Rivers*, the swarthy black-haired boy who used to be so fond of baby *Janita* on board ship; who would clamber down from the rigging to take her in his arms, and stroke her pale face with those sunburnt fingers of his. *Ilsie* said she was quite sure *Gavin* had the fairy touch, for no sooner did the child find itself in his arms than its fretful wail ceased, and a smile came upon its baby lips. Ah! if there were any *Gavin Rivers* now to take hold of her hot hand, and stroke away that pain from her aching forehead! Where was he, and should she ever see him again? And would there ever be any one else in the world to be kind to her? Or was it to be, "*Jane, child, Jane!*" to

the end of the chapter; and was her life to go wearing on through schemes and methods, until death came—death which, perhaps, was not far off now?

So she lay there all day; Miss Hepzibah's voice kept sounding through the house, sometimes calling, sometimes scolding, sometimes cautioning. And when Miss Hepzibah's voice was still, Janita could hear the wind roaring round and round the chimneys, whistling up the elm trees of Meadowthorpe lane, shaking the heavy window frames, shivering amongst the ivy leaves. Grey twilight gathered in the room; things began to look dim and ghostlike. She could no longer discern the outline of the little white china dogs that sat on the chimneypiece, with their noses pointing up to the ceiling, nor of the embroidered ravens with their beef-steaks and penny loaves; and the grand sampler, with all its houses and trees and gooseberry bushes, looked just like a dim coloured stain on the wall, nothing more than that. But the wind kept on shivering among the ivy with a weary restless sound, that made Janita shiver too.

By and by Miss Hepzibah, who had come up at judicious intervals throughout the day, made her

appearance with an evening dose of sweet nitre and water-gruel, and a great quantity of very good advice, an article which she always kept by her. When she heard that steady tramp on the stair, Janita put the sheet over her head, for she wanted her aunt to think she was asleep. But it was no use.

“Now, Jane, child! I’ve brought your supper. You see what a very sad thing it is to give way to temper. You’ve just been and gone and got cold with sitting out on those damp leaves. You really must learn to conduct yourself with more womanly propriety. I dare say this will be wholesome experience for you. And now you must be composed”—for the girl’s eyes were beginning to glitter with tears—“and you must take this gruel, and then go to sleep as fast as you can.”

To which very excellent counsel Janita listened with drowsy patience, and then drifted away into a disturbed dream, from which she awoke to find the room quite dark, not a glimmer of light anywhere except close to the foot of her bed, where all sorts of ugly misshapen faces seemed to be staring at her; and lean, scranny hands were holding out schemes; and voices, such harsh discordant

voices, were screaming—"Jane, child! Jane! time to get up, time for the morning reading. Jane, child! Jane!"

"A disordered stomach," said Miss Hepzibah, that same night, as she and the Professor sat in the dining-room. "That tea of Mrs. Narrowby's gave her the headache, no doubt; they always have such very strong tea at Gablehouse, and then her outbreak of temper finished up the business. It's a dreadful thing, is such a temper as hers."

"Zibie," said the Professor, very timidly, "do you—do you think she is happy? Do we manage her properly?"

"Happy, brother Jabez! Ill-regulated minds are never happy. And as for the management, trust me. When I get her made a woman, it will be all right."

But in her heart of hearts, Miss Hepzibah thought that a woman was a very difficult thing to make—a *very* difficult thing.

CHAPTER XV.



MORNING came. It brought with it more headache, and more shivering, and more fever. And the remembrance of dreams—oh, such awful dreams! In which Janita thought she was lying stiff and cold, but not dead, in her coffin on the ship's deck; and she could hear the sharks tumbling about in the water, and then the plank was tilted up, and she went gliding down, oh, horror! into their great fishy mouths. But just before the shining teeth closed upon her, she woke with a scream, and found herself in the dark, with only those ghostly faces gibbering at her bedside, and the wind shivering amongst the aspen branches.

Dr. Maguire was sent for, the first time he ever had been sent for to that house. He said it was

fever, a violent attack, too ; brought on by cold, possibly aggravated by excitement of some kind. It was impossible as yet to say how the case would end. Fevers were such awkward, lingering things, especially for those whose constitutions were not very strong. Even if she did get over the worst, it would be a long time before she regained strength, and became quite herself again.

This was said, not in Janita's hearing, but down below, to the Professor and his sister. Poor Uncle Jabez looked very much shocked, and shook his head, and then went back again to his study where he stood on the hearth-rug a full hour, twisting up a mathematical proposition in his fingers, and wondering whether, after all, he had done the very best possible thing when he went into Scotland and pulled the little lintie out of its warmed-lined nest, to feed it with water from a patent bottle, and hemp seed, the best that could be bought in St. Olave's.

But Miss Hepzibah did not look shocked. What was the use of looking shocked ? Neither did she stand on the hearth-rug for an hour, twiddling something in her hands. What useful purpose could that answer ? No ; Miss Hepzibah

had her work to do, and she set herself to it there and then.

Miss Hepzibah considered herself an admirable nurse in serious cases. She must say she had a great objection to half-and-half illnesses, where the patient had energy enough left to be troublesome, and scarcely knew whether he ailed anything or not, and had sense sufficient to refuse his medicines, and know when they ought to be given him ; but a real, proper, well-defined attack, a case where the patient was handed over bodily to her sole management, without ability of resistance or interference,—Miss Hepzibah liked a case of that kind ; she gloried in it. She rose, then, to the full height of her nature, she was supreme ! She could manage a case of *that* kind as well as any woman in the kingdom.

So as soon as Dr. Maguire had given his decision, she set to work. She had the bed curtains of the long room taken down, and the window draperies removed, because they obstructed ventilation ; and the carpets taken up, except a little strip from the door to the bed, because so much woollen in a room was an unwholesome thing for sick people. And the looking-glass, with its little knick knack-

ries, was cleared away, in order that the dressing-table might be used as a stand for phials and medicine bottles. And when poor Janita, who had been listlessly watching all these operations, asked their meaning, Miss Hepzibah said, as briskly as if she had been ordering the preliminaries of a wedding :

“Jane, child, you’re going to have an illness. Dr. Maguire says so, and therefore you must make up your mind to it. Your uncle and I will do all we can for you, and you must do everything you are told, and take your medicines and things like a sensible person ; and if it pleases Providence to bring you round again, I dare say you’ll be all the better, for my grandmother used to say that fevers cleared up the constitution wonderfully.”

And away bustled Miss Hepzibah out of the room, with an armfull of Janita’s walking dresses, that would not be wanted any more at present, and so it was better to have them out of the way.

But it was of little consequence to poor Janita what they did with her, or with anything belonging to her. Very soon she reached that strange mysterious border land from which time and all its interests look quite dim and unimportant. At first

the days passed in a confused waking dream. She was too weak to think or feel or fear. She was only conscious of a tall figure tramping about the bare floors, and coming to her bedside very often with something to drink; and speaking to her in a voice which, though Miss Hepzibah thought it a beautiful sick-room whisper, smote upon poor Janita's tired brain like the stroke of a sledge hammer. And sometimes another tall figure, not Miss Hepzibah's, bent over her and touched her forehead with its long fingers; and once she thought, but only once, with its lips. And Janita had just sense enough left to feel that it was very kind of Uncle Jabez to leave his mathematics and come to see how she was.

When the room was quiet, when the night lamp glimmered faintly over the bare walls, Janita used to fancy she saw a little boy sitting by her bedside; a little boy with black hair and sunburnt face, who stroked her cheek with his tawny fingers, or laid them on her forehead to cool its burning heat. And she would stretch out her hands to touch him, but instead she only touched her cold medicine bottles, or the barley water jug that stood on the little table close to the bed. That was in her quiet

hours, when the fever had spent itself for a time. Soon it came back again, bringing with it terrible visions ; always of a becalmed vessel, with lightnings quivering round its masts, and a coffin sliding from its bulwarks into the deep sea, where big sharks with glassy eyes and open mouths were waiting to gulp it down before it could have time to sink. And though she was lying in the coffin, hard and stiff, yet she was not dead, and she could not die.

So days passed on. But whether they were many or few, Janita could not tell, for she lived through them with a life that does not count by time. And as each day passed, it left behind it no memory, only a dull, vacant blank.

Once more that fearful ocean dream came sweeping through her brain, making her shriek out for dread of it, bringing Uncle Jabez and all the rest of them to her bedside. After it she slept a long, long sleep. Dr. Maguire said life itself depended on that sleep. When at last she woke, no feverish spectres glared upon her any more. All around and about her there seemed to be folded down a deep deep peace. And two verses of those old Psalms that she had listened to so

often in Inverallan kirk, were singing themselves through her thoughts. These were the words of them :—

“The storm is changed into a calm
At his command and will,
So that the waves which raged before,
Now quiet are and still.

“Then are they glad—because at rest,
And quiet now they be ;
So to the haven he them brings,
Which they desire to see.”

After that Janita's life came to her again. Not as it had been before, fierce, wayward, restless ; but full of faith and love. He, whose ways are not as our ways, had taken her for a season from the reach of human teaching, that He might show her His own truth, and lead her faltering steps to the light. How, she knew not, but thoughts that had long lain dormant woke again, as if written in her heart with something that needed to be overflowed by pain and suffering before it would reveal itself. Words spoken by the good old clergyman, lessons that had been all unheeded when years and years ago Mrs. Home taught her by the Manse fireside, came back to her now, bringing with them all their meaning. And these thoughts and these words

and these lessons filled her new life with beauty and sweetness.

But Miss Hepzibah knew nothing of all this. Except that Jane was very patient, and took her medicine without grumbling at all, and never teased to have things that were not good for her, and was always so grateful and so content with everything that was done. And when punctually as the clock struck eight, the Professor's sister came up with the family Bible and marched through a chapter or a psalm, Janita listened reverently, instead of fidgeting and twitching her hands about as she always used to do at worship downstairs.

"Brother Jabez," said Miss Hepzibah, about ten days after Janita had passed the crisis of her fever. "Brother Jabez, I really do believe I shall make a woman of that girl after all."

Oh! Miss Hepzibah, what an admirable thing it is to have faith in one's own powers!

But then came the convalescence. And that was very dreary. To lie in bed for hours, looking out of that curtainless window, through which nothing could be seen but a succession of bare level fields, with long rows of pollard willows marking the course of the dykes, and here and there a

tall solemn poplar, whose naked branches made a black network on the cloudy sky—was surely exercise enough for patience. Or when she was a little better, when it was one of her good days, Bessie would pack her up with cushions in the great dimity-covered chair, and wheel her to the window, where, too weak to read or work, she would sit and meditate on the kitchen garden, with its rows of bilious-looking cabbages, and consumptive raspberry canes, and beds of rhubarb that could no longer coax even a single sunbeam to play at hide and seek amongst their great scrambling leaves; and beyond all the high red brick walls, stained with damp, and covered with the skeletons of plum-trees, that were waiting for the warm breath of spring to clothe their poor old bones with life again. Oh! it was very dreary!

And no Willie Home to come and read to her out of Shakespeare. And no Maggie to put her arms round her neck and tell her pretty tales. And no Agnes, swift-footed mountain girl, to bring her bunches of heather, sweet dewy purple heather, from the hill-sides. Yes, and she missed the tender words of the good old clergyman and his wife, and the caresses which in the dear Inverallan

home would have been shed upon her thick as the autumn leaves that were now falling all around. For it may be highly useful and practical, but, oh! that is a starving life into which love never comes; where the warmest rooms of the heart must always be kept shut and bolted, where never a sweet loving word can be spoken, or a kiss suffered to wing its flight from lip to lip.

Janita scolded herself though, whenever she began to think thoughts like these. Who was it that had learned in *every* state therewith to be content? And that lesson is left in the world for everyone to learn. She would learn it, too.

Still, that room was very dreary. And Janita felt quite refreshed one morning when Bessie came in, under pretence of cleaning up the fire, but in reality to bring a bit of scarlet geranium, set round with glossy dark green ivy leaves.

"Oh! Bessie, how pretty! Do let me look."

"You may have it, Miss Jane, and welcome; I'm sure it's no good to me."

"But where did it come from, and so late, too?"

"It was the young man Roy as gived me it," and Bessie tossed her pretty head on one side, so

that the firelight made all manner of ripples on her wavy black hair. "I've telled him over and over again, I don't care a bit for his rubbish, but he keeps on giving of 'em to me. If they was artificial now, I could put 'em in my Sunday bonnet; but that wouldn't be no good either, for missis is dead set again artificials for the maids."

"Roy?" said Janita; "that is the young man with light hair, who sits in the singing-pew."

"Yes, Miss; Roy has a beautiful head o' hair, and he sings splendid, and he carries hisself just like a prince. But I don't care for him a bit, I don't, and I'd tell him so if he axed me, that I would."

And Bessie shook the ash-pan vehemently, and brushed the little grate until it shone again; whilst Janita stroked the bright flowers with her thin fingers, those poor thin fingers that you might almost see through, they had got so worn.

"I'll tell you what, Miss Jane, though," said Bessie, by-and-by, as innocently and unconsciously as could be, "if the pretty things pleases you, I can get you as many as ever you like with just going down to old Mr. Royland's garden. I get the

vegetables there, Miss, just past the Hall, down by the dyke-side. Mr. Royland has the best flowers in the village—he always gets the first prize at the Duke's cottage show, does Mr. Royland. Shall I get you a lot to-morrow, Miss Jane?"

"Oh! Bessie, I wish you would!"

"Then you shall have them, Miss, I'm sure you shall."

And Bessie gathered up her dusters, and almost danced out of the room. She would do anything to please Miss Jane, that she would.

Ah! Bessie! Bessie! that smile on your face is not one of pure benevolence! You know well enough that a single half hour at that flower garden down by the dyke-side, is worth a whole Sunday afternoon holiday anywhere else. And though you plague the life out of him with those wilful, flirtish ways of yours, yet you care more for Roy, though he has but a guinea a week, and a sick mother to keep out of it, than for all the Peter Monks and thriving young blacksmiths in the world.

CHAPTER XVI.



ESSIE contrived to be sent to the baker's next morning, about the time the Duke's men were going back to their work after breakfast. Peter Monk was crossing the road in front of the gable-end window. Roy was just turning out of Meadowthorpe lane, so far behind them that perhaps no eye but Bessie's would have distinguished those broad shoulders and that kingly step of his.

She stopped to speak to Monk, or rather he came across the road to speak to her. Peter Monk always took this privilege to himself. He would step up to her in a jaunty, free and easy sort of way as they came out of church on a Sunday night, and drawing her hand under his arm, make some complimentary speech about her pretty eyes, or her wavy hair; or perhaps he would

admire her new ribbons, or tell her how well the little bit of crimson inside her best bonnet set off her thick black eyebrows and the pure whiteness of her forehead. But Roy never stopped her unless she spoke to him first; there was such a proud shyness about him, especially as he was not in a position to say anything about marrying yet. And as often as not, the little puss would walk straight past him without so much as a single look from under those dark eyelashes which almost swept her rosy cheeks. Though after she had done it, Bessie used to feel sorry, and would have given anything to be able to run back and say a single word to him. But it was too late. There he was, away down the street, treading like the very Duke himself, looking so brave and handsome, spite of his grey blouse and blue check shirt sleeves. And then the shadow of a serious thought used to flit across Bessie's mind. What if some one else was to take it into her head that Roy was brave and handsome? Polly Rush for instance, the white-smith's daughter; or Miss Prudames, as the village people called her, parlour-maid to Mrs. Macturk, who had so much money in the St. Olave's savings bank; or Mary Andrews, orphan niece

to the clerk of the works, who had rather a hard time of it with her uncle, and would be glad enough, if the folks said true, to get a quiet home of her own. Bessie wouldn't go past Roy any more without speaking to him, or at any rate giving him a pleasant look out of her grey eyes. But next time she met him the old foolish flirting propensity came back as strong as ever, and the eyelids were dropped until not a single glance had room to get through their thick fringes, and Roy used to pass on, feeling so sad and disheartened.

The flirting propensity was uppermost when she met Peter Monk this morning. Perhaps it was quickened by seeing Roy just at the turning down of Meadowthorpe lane. And when Monk came across, with his easy jaunty air, and shook hands with her, and began to walk along by her side, Bessie made no excuse about wanting to get on fast, or having to go across into the grocer's shop, which she would so easily have done if she wished to get away from him; which she had done over and over again when young Roy by a rare chance had ventured to measure his steps with hers down the length of the street.

But Bessie rather liked to be seen walking with

Peter Monk. It gave her a little important feeling. He was quite the foremost of the Duke's men, at least the ordinary workmen, second only to Mr. Andrews himself; and if anything happened to Mr. Andrews, there was no saying but what Mr. Monk might get to be clerk of the works, and then how the village girls would envy her! Besides, he did not wear a checked shirt as the other men did, nor go backwards and forwards without his coat as Roy used to do sometimes in the hot weather. And on Sundays he had starched wristbands coming down over his kid gloves, and studs that looked quite as fine as any that Mr. Narrowby himself ever wore, and a broad-cloth suit such as Dr. Maguire or even the clergyman need not be ashamed of putting on.

Then, he was very rich; everybody said he had money in a bank in London, and it would be a good match for her if she was to marry him, though he *had* got a cast in his eyes and his black hair grew so straight and lank. Bessie was sure he liked her. True, he had never "come to the point," as Miss Hepzibah would have called it, or "mentioned his intentions," as the lawyers

would say, but no one could deny that he had been "partic'larly friendly," quite as much so as Roy, or Alick, or the tall footman at the Bishop's palace. And if Bessie liked, she might be Mrs. Peter Monk. At least she thought so. So she walked by his side all the way up the street as far as the Duke's-yard, a long way past the baker's shop. And when he left her to go to his work, she turned to come back again for her loaf, the real purpose of her errand unaccomplished as yet.

Roy watched them all down the village. Poor Roy ! it was a sad sight to him to see Monk's lean screwy face turning itself from time to time towards Bessie's bonnet, and his hand holding hers for such a long time before he went into the Duke's-yard. Roy loved her so truly, that if he had thought there was another man in the world who could make her happier than himself, he would have given her up to that man. And perhaps no human love ever goes further than that. But he knew Monk for a base-minded fellow, who believed in nothing good, who would never be a blessing but only a curse and grief to the woman whose love he won. It would have

been a great bitterness to give Bessie up, even to young Alick, the smith, brave, frank, honest, though passionate young Alick, or to the tall footman, who, if he had not a great allowance of brains, made up for it by easy good-nature. But for his bonnie flower to be clutched in Peter Monk's black hands—oh! that made Roy feel desperate. He could not bear it. And then he used to brace himself with double energy to his work. Early and late, long before and long after the Duke's bell rang, he would be there, toiling hard for those few pounds that might make him rich enough to win Bessie for his own.

She came out of the baker's shop just in time to give him a coquettish glance and a word or two in passing.

"Roy, I shall be down at your father's garden this noon."

"Shall you, Bessie?" and Roy's face began to cheer up directly.

"Yes—our young lady that's ill has took a fancy to have a few flowers, and there's nothing in the Missis's garden, let alone cabbage leaves and rhubarb stalks as is running to seed. Miss Jane,

bless her, is the only pretty thing alive at our house."

"Except yourself, Bessie," Roy could not help saying.

"Hold your tongue, Roy. I won't never speak to you no more if you tell me such rubbish."

"Well, I'll be still, then. But I shall be down at the garden a bit after twelve, and I'll get you the flowers myself."

"You needn't trouble yourself to do nothing of the sort. I reckon your father knows how to pull flowers as well as you do. And maybe I shall send Abigail, after all. Good morning."

And away she went down the street, leaving a little bit of sunshine, not quite unclouded, though, in Roy's heart. Yet, in spite of her gay carelessness, she would have been *so* disappointed if he had not gone. But of course, Roy knew nothing about that.

At twelve she put on her second best bonnet, the one she had just trimmed up with scarlet for autumn, and set off to old Ben Royland's garden.

Bessie often wished she might wear a hat. Her face would look so pretty under it. A great deal prettier, she was quite sure, than those Miss Nar-

rowbys', who had just got new black mushrooms with long scarlet plumes in them ; almost as pretty as even Mrs. Mabury's, the rector's lady, whose crimson feather drooped over such splendid braids of jet black hair. Bessie had a great deal more colour than Mrs. Mabury, and she believed she could make her hair look quite as nice if she had time enough in a morning to brush it out and brighten it with pomatum. Only that ugly old Abigail would have the glass first, and she kept it such a long time, fidgeting about over her wisps of tow, that before Bessie had time to give a proper look at her own face, or see if her cap was put on straight, Miss Hepzibah's voice would be screaming up the stairs,

"Girls ! girls ! do you *ever* intend to come down and get the fire made, or am I to do it myself ? Pretty work, indeed ! A couple of maid-servants in the house, and can't get them down by five o'clock in a morning. Dear me ! Dear me !"

And then Bessie used to stuff her hair promiscuously into the thick muslin cap, without oiling or brushing, or anything. Otherwise it might have been quite equal to Mrs. Mabury's.

But once, not very long ago, indeed, it was that

same day that Miss Hepzibah and Janita went to the working-party, Bessie stole silently into the long bedroom, and, pulling off her ugly muslin cap, she tied on the brown straw hat which hung at the back of the door. And she fastened her hair up behind, and let it hang down in curls in front, just long enough to lie upon her shoulders; and she did look so nice—though there was no one to tell her so. For the deep brim cast a shadow over her eyes, making them seem larger and deeper than ever, and the clear outlines of her face came out so well, and the glossy green leaves that the hat was trimmed with, set off her rosy cheeks ten times better than a bonnet could ever do. Bessie was just going to throw Janita's plaid cloak over her shoulders to complete the effect, when—oh! how tiresome!—a step was heard on the stairs, and she had to whisk off her borrowed plumes and put on the frowsy old cap again, which seemed uglier now than before. But never mind. She was not always going to live housemaid at Miss Hepzibah's. Some day she would have a home of her own. And then, when she was the tall footman's wife, or Mrs. Alick Midgeley, or Mrs. Monk, or Mrs.—well, Mrs. anybody else, she

should do just as she liked, and wear a hat with ivy leaves on the top of it; yes, and a chenille net, too, with gold sprigs, that she would. And as she put the ugly cap on again, she wondered, as many a housemaid has wondered before her, and as many will continue to wonder to the end of the present social system, why some are born to scour and dust and be scolded on wages of eight pounds a year, whilst others wear scarlet plumes in their black hats, and do nothing but fancy work, and have more money than they know how to spend.

I dare say you will say Bessie was a very foolish girl, given up entirely to vanity and frivolity; and that if she had been your housemaid, you would have given her a month's warning, and got rid of her. I don't contradict you. Bessie *was* foolish, undeniably foolish. And very likely you will say, too, that Roy was just as foolish, to allow himself to be bewitched in this way by a pair of rosy cheeks, and a pretty mouth, and grey eyes with long black lashes to them. I don't contradict that statement. It is perfectly true, of course it is. But perhaps some day we may get a look down into those grey eyes, and find something else than coquetry shining through them. And, perhaps, in

years to come, when the rosy colour has parted with some of its brightness, and those round cheeks have lost just a very little of their graceful outline, Bessie will change into a loving, faithful, true-hearted woman ; a woman that any man might be glad to call his wife. Very likely, though neither you nor I know anything about it yet, Roy, with love's keen second sight, sees this latent truth and faithfulness ; and so prizes the shy, flirtish creature, now, for what she may hereafter be to him. This is possible. I do not say that it is probable. After all, she may marry Peter Monk ; and then.

It was only a quarter past twelve when Bessie, having made herself look as nice as she could, reached the garden down by the dyke-side. But Roy was there before her. He must have walked very fast, for by the sunlight shining on his glazed cap, she could see him standing at the little gate long before she got past the Hall meadows. When she came nearer to him, she thought he looked ill and anxious, rather. Bessie, taking her wages regularly, and having plenty to eat and drink, provided without care or payment of her own, did not know that this had been a very hard season for the

Meadowthorpe poor; that many a day-labourer, with even extra toil, had been unable to keep himself off the parish; that the orchard, Ben Royland's harvest-field, had entirely failed, and that Roy had to slave early and late to make ends meet at home, to say nothing of putting by a little money in the St. Olave's savings-bank, which he had never failed to do yet since he took regular wages. But the young man kept all these family matters to himself, with a silent sort of dignity.

Still, though there were no apples weighing down the branches with their golden clusters, and not so much as a single pear on the great Jargonelle tree, whose crop last year put many a solid five shilling piece into old Ben Royland's pocket, the garden did look very pretty, glistening all over with colour in the midst of that brown Autumn landscape, like a jewel set upon some sad-coloured dress. It was an early November day, warm and mild—much too warm for the time of year, as Dr. Maguire said, and as the fever, which, week after week, stole fresh victims, proved. There was a soft blue haze upon the Meadowthorpe flats, making them look like one long stretch of ocean, upon whose level track the windmills, dotted here and

there, might be white-sailed vessels. Away down at the bottom of the garden, past that narrow dangerous little bit of the haling-bank road, Meadowthorpe dyke rolled its lazy waters; rolled them so slowly that the river-weeds scarce seemed to move, and the blue forget-me-nots and tall flag-leaves could see their shadows quite unbroken beneath the sleepy tide.

The garden was all in a glow with rich Autumn colours. Poor Ben had had nothing to take to market this season, so he could afford to spend more time over his flowers. Rows of dahlias, purple, ruby red, and crimson, nodded to each other across the beds; and yellow sunflowers, each one as big as the church communion plate, lifted their brazen faces to the sky; and—for as yet no frost had come to nip them—there were masses of tom-thumb geraniums, that almost dazzled you to look at them, with fountain-like clusters of fuchsias, always dropping showers of crimson rain; and beds of nasturtiums, that trailed their pale green leaves and golden red blossoms away over the hedge, and quite down to the haling-bank, so rich, almost impudent, were they in their overflow of life.

Roy gathered a bunch of the best flowers he could find for Bessie. He did not say very much. For him it was happiness enough to feel that she was close by him, that he had but to turn and meet her bright face, with its glistening eyes looking shyly at him. Just as, most likely, they had looked at Peter Monk three hours ago. Ah ! perhaps it was this made Roy look so serious, so very quiet and serious, that Bessie, as she followed him about from plot to plot of the gay flower garden, began to wonder whether anything had happened to "put Roy out of the way."

But, except in those little home matters which no one need be troubled with, Roy was a frank outspoken young man. He could not bear to have anything on his mind unsaid, even the slightest little grudge not fairly brought out and explained. And so, as he gave Bessie the flowers, just as she was going out of the gate, he kept her hand fast for a while.

"Bessie," he said, "that was a fine talk you had with Peter Monk this morning."

Oh ! that was what made him so silent, was it ? She could plague him then, and put him out of the way by flirting with someone else. To Bessie's

foolish little heart, this was a great triumph. With a toss of her head, that sent the sunlight rippling all over her black hair, she said, coquettishly enough :

“ And why shouldn't I walk with Peter Monk ? He's as good as anybody else in the lordship, and he ain't half so poor and mean as a many that goes back'ards and for'ards without their coats, as if they couldn't afford to wear em only of nights when work's done.”

Roy winced rather, at this allusion to his shirt sleeves, and determined that when the hot weather came round again he would put his blouse on regularly, though it might almost melt him away.

“ If he had a real man's heart under his coat, Bessie, I wouldn't say a word again him ; but Peter Monk's not the man that'll make you happy. May-be he'll coax and stroke you down for a bit with his soft words, and then—”

“ They weren't soft words,” said Bessie, quickly. “ He only told me there was going to be a dance at the Checkers next Monday night, if I could slip out unbeknown to the Missis for a bit.”

Such a smile of scorn as passed over Roy's uplifted face when she told him that ! Such a look

of mingled tenderness and regret as he bent down over her again, the simple pretty thing, his white-winged butterfly that had flown so near the scorching flame.

"Bessie! and could you ever frame to speak to a man again who would ask you to do such a mean, underhanded thing as that? But say you don't mean to go. Say it, Bessie."

"Oh, yes. I'll say it fast enough. She's awful sharp, is Miss Hepzibah. I do believe she's got eyes behind as well as front. I'd like to see anyone slip out unbeknown to her. No, I reckon I can't do it. And I telled Peter Monk I couldn't."

"But, Bessie, why didn't you tell him that you *wouldn't*?"

"I don't know as there was any call to tell him that. I've got a muslin dress as I could have starched up and made it look as good as new. It's a good bit since I've had a dance now. Peter Monk says he'd like finely to stand up with me. And I don't see why he shouldn't."

Roy looked at her as she stood there by the gate post, plucking away the leaves from the flowers he had given her. The sunlight shining through a willow tree close by, sent the shadows

of its branches to and fro upon her face, that face that looked so fresh and bonnie within the close cottage bonnet. He was quite sure she would not do anything wrong. Only if that Monk got a hold over her, he had such a way with him, no one could stand against it. Plenty of money too, as the people said he had. Roy sighed and looked more serious than ever.

Bessie did not like that sort of thing at all. Some one to make pretty speeches to her, and tell her how nice she looked, just as Mr. Monk had done in the morning, that was what she wanted. And Roy had said nothing of the sort; he had only lectured her. She wouldn't put up with it. She flounced away from the gate post, her eyes sparkling, her cheek flushed.

"It isn't no use standing here, Roy. I don't see as you've any right to talk to me like this. I shall dance with Peter Monk if I like, and you may dance with who you like. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Bessie. Only tell Miss Raeburn she shall have as many more flowers as she likes."

"Very well. Abigail can fetch 'em next time."

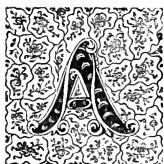
Roy did not offer to go home with her; but he

followed her a long way off, and never lost sight of the pretty girlish figure until it had disappeared behind the red-brick wall of the Aspens. Then he knew that she was safe. And Bessie, as soon as she had got fairly out on the road, felt so vexed with herself that she could have cried.

Oh, Bessie, Bessie ! how can you plague him so ? I will say myself now that you *are* foolish—yes, downright foolish. And that faithfulness we spoke of a little while ago, hidden far away down somewhere in your heart ? It is so cleverly hidden now, that even poor Roy, trusting as he is, can scarcely believe it there at all. Take care, Bessie. For there is Polly Rush and Miss Prudames, and little Mary Andrews, and——

Nay, you need not say anything more to Bessie, she will not hear you. She is crying in good earnest, bitterly enough now ; and it will be all she can do to get her face straightened before she reaches the village street. Poor Bessie ! What will it all come to ?

CHAPTER XVII.



AFTER that, there came many a bouquet into Janita's sick room. Sometimes it was a single cluster of white roses from the bush that clambered over Ben Royland's cottage wall ; sometimes a bit of scarlet geranium, framed round with ivy leaves ; sometimes only two or three sprays of fern, with ribbon grass amongst them ; sometimes a few mountain ashberries, or purple bramble leaves gathered from the hedgeside. But whatever it might be, there always came with it the same message :

“ Please, Miss Jane, Roy's duty and would you accept of a few flowers ? ”

Generally Bessie used to bring them with a shy bright smile and a glistening look in her grey eyes, but occasionally she would jerk them on the

table with a saucy toss of the head and a little burst of petulant waywardness.

"Can't think what he brings such rubbish for. I'm sure I've telled him over and over again his bits o' grass and bracken aren't worth saying thank you for."

And then Janita knew that the love-story, which, with a woman's keen penetration, she had long ago found out, must have met with some vexatious break. At such times she would contrive that Bessie should have an errand into the village after the Duke's men had left work, or down to old Ben's garden between twelve and one o'clock; which errand generally set matters straight again, and brought back poor Bessie's good temper.

Janita was recovering very nicely now. Most days she was able to be up and sit for several hours in the easy chair, reading, or doing some light work. Dr. Maguire said that in another week, if she still kept improving, she might come down into the dining-room.

Yes, and then the old life would have to be lived over again, and her weary feet would have to fix themselves once more in that narrow painful groove; and the scheme that had haunted her hours

of delirium would come into operation, with its solid reading, and its pursuit of the accomplishments, and its domestic avocations, and its plain sewing, and its useful conversation, interspersed with a running fire of hints and cautions and judicious admonitions from Miss Hepzibah. Oh, it was miserable to think of it ! And strong though she was in that new inner might which God had given her, yet poor Janita almost said to herself, that if such a life was the only one possible for her, it would be better to die.

But a newscheme, quite different from that which, carefully written in good legible round hand, hung in her bed-room, was being prepared for Janita Raeburn.

It had been one of her bad days. She had got up late in the morning, and sat for two or three hours by the fire ; then spiritless and worn out with headache, had lain down again in the bare, curtainless room, whose only bit of brightness was that which hovered round Roy's nosegay of fern and geranium. Waking at last from a dreary, unrefreshing slumber, some one was bending over her.

Not Miss Hepzibah. Not the Professor. Not

Dr. Maguire nor Bessie. It was that sweet, quiet-looking lady, whose face had been in her memory ever since, four months ago, they met in Meadowthorpe lane. With a cry of delight, Janita sprung up, and put her arms round Miss Alwyne's neck. Oh, what a treat to have some one she could put her arms round, some one who would press upon her poor little thin cheeks such kisses as Miss Alwyne pressed upon them now; some one who would let her laugh, or cry, or be silent, just as the mood might be!

It was the crying mood first. She felt herself drawn close up to her new friend, and her aching head nestled into such a pleasant resting-place. Miss Alwyne did not speak for some time; the tears were in her own eyes too, as she pressed to her loving heart the lonely motherless girl who clung so closely to her. She rocked her for a long time in her arms, as she would have rocked and quieted a little child. And when the half hysterical laughing and crying had both passed away, she said very gently—

“Janita, my dear.”

Oh, that “my dear!” How musical it seemed! How different from Miss Hepzibah's shrill, rasp-

ing "Jane, child, Jane!" Janita thought she had never heard anything so sweet before, even in Inverallan Manse, as Miss Alwyne's voice.

"Janita, my dear, I am going to run away with you, and keep you all to myself for a long time. Dr. Maguire says a change will do you good, and your aunt and uncle have given me leave to take you. Now, will you try and get up this very minute, and come down-stairs with me?"

Janita did not need twice telling to do that. But the getting down-stairs was not such an easy thing. Miss Alwyne had to half lead, half carry her, and even then it was only done with many gasping halts. At last she stood once more in the dingy old dining-room, trembling and almost ready to drop.

Everything in it looked just the same as when, six weeks ago, she had stood there in the middle of the floor, stamping like a little fury. Janita did not feel much like stamping now, even if she had had anything to stamp about. The chairs were all in the same places, the pens and pencils arranged in straight lines on the writing-table, the chimney ornaments planted as if by a plumb-line, Miss Hepzibah herself, rigid and compact as ever, knitting

in the high-backed arm-chair by the fire. Perhaps, though, she looked a little bit pleasanter than usual, for Aunt Hepzibah had a vein of kindness in her composition, and she was really glad to see her niece down-stairs again, even if she did not express that satisfaction in the usual way by kisses and congratulations. All that she said was—

“Jane, child, I am very thankful that Providence has brought you round again, and I hope now you will try to lead a new life, and act like a woman.”

Janita hoped so too.

Bessie was standing in the doorway, looking as pleased as possible, and close by her was somebody else, very much like Roy. But it was such an unlikely thing for Roy to be standing in Miss Hepzibah's front passage, side by side with Bessie too, that Janita thought she must be mistaken.

Then Miss Alwyne and Aunt Hepzibah began to wrap her up in shawls, and Aunt Hepzibah brought her a glass of wine, and Miss Alwyne covered her over, head, face, and all, with a great fur-lined wrap. After that, she was lifted up in some one's arms—not the Professor's certainly,

for they did not feel at all sharp and bony—and carried away, whither she could not tell. Only by cold air blowing upon her, she felt that she had got out of doors again.

And then, in a few minutes, she could not have gone very far in such a little time, they stopped. She heard a door open, and Miss Alwyne said—

“This way, Roy, please.”

Oh! so Roy was carrying her, that was it. She felt herself taken over a soft-matted floor, and across a carpet to a sofa, where she was laid down.

“Don’t open your eyes yet,” Miss Alwyne said. So Janita kept them fast shut, whilst her wrappings were taken off and her dress arranged, and her hair smoothed by such gentle, careful hands.

“Now, where are you?”

And Janita did not know whether to laugh or cry. However, she settled it by doing both at once.

“Oh! Miss Alwyne!”

That was all she could say. And when she had said it, she rubbed the tears out of her eyes, and looked round.

She had closed those eyes in Miss Hepzibah’s old dining-room, with its stripy up and down

paper, and its ugly family portraits, and its monotonous drab carpet with bars of black and red, and its fierce scarlet moreen curtains that would stick about in such awkward shapes—she opened them in a dear little cosy nest of a room, just the size of Dr. Home's study at Inverallan, where firelight was chasing the evening shadows from walls covered all over with dainty tracery work of gold, leaves and flowers, and tendrils and arabesque work, all gold. The carpet was like moss for colour and softness, with here and there a little yellow primrose peeping out amongst the green. Green damask curtains were looped back with gold cord on each side a low bay window, from which she could see the cottage lights gleaming far away down the street. A table with books and work and a vase of flowers stood in one corner of the room, not "books suitable for young people," Janita hoped. There was a thick, warm, flossy hearthrug, in the middle of which a French cat was curled up, purring very loud. And somewhere, but Janita could not for the life of her tell where, a musical snuff-box was letting fall a cascade of tiny sweet notes. First of all the tune was, "Ye Banks and Braes," but even whilst she

listened it changed to "Home, sweet Home."

And Janita felt that, indeed, she had at last come *home*.

Oh! the rest, and the peace, and the stillness! She had but to lift her eyes, and there was Miss Alwyne sitting in the chair by the fire, with some light sort of netting work in her hands, and such a pleasant unconscious smile upon her face—that face out of which shone always the stedfast calm of a soul at peace with the world, itself, and God.

For sometime Janita could not believe it was real. She scarcely dare close her eyes for fear when she opened them the dream should have passed away, and she should find herself sitting in the dingy dining-room again, with the Professor snoring in his chair, and Miss Hepzibah knitting away with such desperate energy, interspersing the performance with judicious speeches or prudent maxims, which always began with "Jane, child, when I was a young person," &c.

At last she got Miss Alwyne to come and sit close by her, so close that they could clasp hands together; and Janita feeling herself held within those kind arms, knew that it was no dream, but real, sweet rest that had come to her. As if, after

long travelling over a barren sandy desert, she had reached at last unawares a stream of living water, into whose cool depths the little flowers looked, and over whose rippling waves the merry sunshine glanced. And lying there, so quiet, so happy, so nested in once more by true-hearted kindness, what could she say but the two lines again of that dear old Scottish Psalm which had been the birthday song of her new life—

“ So to the haven He them brings
Which they desire to see.”

CHAPTER XVIII.



MISS ALWYNE'S house was on the north side of Gentility Square, adjoining that of Mr. Narrowby. At the back was a pleasant plot of ground, losing itself at last in a winding walk which stretched along Meadowthorpe lane, bounded with hazel bushes and evergreens, through whose thick boughs you could now and again catch a glimpse of the level open country. The front rooms commanded a fine view of the old churchyard, with its beautiful sycamores and groups of white thorn trees, which in May and June dropped a snow-fall of tiny blossoms on the graves beneath.

Very little sunshine ever came into Miss Alwyne's cottage, except in summer evenings, when a few slant rays stole through the aspens

in Professor Ruthven's garden. But always as you sat in that pretty little parlour, you might look out upon the sunshine ; you might see it lying in broad sweeps upon the plot of green sward which formed the centre of the square, and tipping the battlements of the church tower, and making twinkling lights and shadows upon the gnarled trunks of the churchyard trees. And in this respect Miss Alwyne's cottage was something like her own life, which was lived in quiet and shadow, but always had sunshine around it. Perhaps, also, when evening came, there would be sunshine within it, too.

Miss Alwyne was one of a class which, in the existing state of English social life, is becoming more and more numerous. With that desire for quietness and seclusion which is natural to most women, she had yet been forced out into the world, and compelled to make her own way in it. Formed to be the guardian angel of some good man's home, true wife, true mother, these ties had been denied her ; she stood alone, a self-supporting woman, with none to care for her, none to work for her ; with no position in the world save that which her own talent and perseverance had won ; indebted to

none for either help or counsel in her daily life.

It is a painful thing to see a woman placed thus; not the less painful because it is so common, or because so many sustain themselves in it with calm, uncomplaining fortitude, working out their own way, doing their own duty in the face of much quiet contempt, or of that galling "poor thing" sort of pity, which is worse than contempt. We have sympathy enough at command for the man who comes home night after night to a lonely fire-side, who has no wife, no child to beguile the weariness of his life; but society has only a veiled decent sort of scorn for women to whom these home ties have been denied, women who have to live their life alone, and sustain themselves apart from the help or counsel of man. Well for such women as these that God sees not as we see.

Miss Alwyne was known in Meadowthorpe as a quiet, staid, well-behaved maiden lady, having her own ways of thinking, which did not always coincide with those of Gentility Square. She was also spoken of as kind, sympathising, never anxious about her own interests when by self-forgetfulness she could advance those of others. No one knew very much about her previous position. She ap-

peared to have outlived most of her relations ; at all events, she was seldom or never visited by them. She lived a very quiet life in that cottage of hers. Sometimes, when she had friends from London staying with her, she would give one or two little evening parties, elegant, though very simple ; but for the most part she kept aloof from general society. On account of her health, most people said, for it was well known that she was very delicate ; but most likely the root of the matter was this, that the Gentility Square families and Miss Alwyne had not much in common.

She had not been in Meadowthorpe long, not more than three or four years. She came to the village from London, where most of her friends resided. Of her past life she scarcely ever spoke. The Misses Vere Aubrey, who found out almost everything about everybody, were never able to find out anything conclusive about Miss Alwyne. They did manage to discover that she belonged to a good family, that her father had been a clergyman, that she was his only child, that he had died suddenly, leaving a widow almost entirely dependent upon her daughter's exertions ; that in some way or other Miss Alwyne had supported both her-

self and her mother, until a few years ago, when the mother died, and the daughter came to live at Meadowthorpe. That was all. Try as they would, the Misses Vere Aubrey could find out no more than that.

She was a pleasant-looking woman, with the steady, thoughtful expression of one who has toiled through much trouble and many cares to sure rest at last. But how that trouble had come, what those cares had been, whether Miss Alwyne had loved and lost, or loved unhappily, or never loved at all; whether the half mourning that she always wore was for father, or mother, or for a friend nearer and dearer still, could only be conjectured. For she never spoke about these things. . No one had any right to ask them of her. She lived a beautiful and wholesome life; she was kind to everyone, spoke evil of none. That being the case, she was not bound to tell Meadowthorpe anything about her past life.

It might have been, most likely it had been, a sad one; but if so, she never complained. Past or present, it was such as God made it, and so was to be borne patiently. Neither, like trouble unworthily received, had any grief of Miss Alwyne's

embittered her nature. She held fast the calm unwavering faith that out of all sorrow we may rise to a nobler life, that never a cherished desire is dropped, a long-sought good given up at God's bidding, but the soul grows holier, the character more sublime.

There are many such in the world, and God loves them tenderly, with a love beyond that which angels win—these patient, faithful human souls from whom He has shut out so much of happiness here, only that He may give them more hereafter. And as they toil on through the darkness of this mortal life, blind, helpless, never repining, never upbraiding, content only to do and endure, surely even the Almighty Himself must long for the time when He may say to them, "It is enough."

But to return to Janita. That beautiful surprise which Miss Alwyne had prepared for her was the prelude to many days of pure unbroken happiness; days whose current was so evenly peaceful, that they passed on unnumbered in their flight, until the scant daylight and the lengthening evenings, and an occasional fall of snow, told that winter had at last set in.

She recovered slowly. Dr. Maguire said the

time of the year was against her. If only she had had sense enough to be ill in spring, when, as strength came to her again, she might have gone out into the May sunshine, she would soon have been well. But these damps and fogs and frosts would keep her a prisoner for some weeks yet.

Idle weeks they were, very idle weeks. At least, so Miss Hepzibah would have said, who thought no time well spent that did not bring about some visible, practical result, and who set down every day as wasted, in which so much solid reading and plain sewing and domestic practice had not been accomplished. But busy days for those who took count of the silent, almost unconscious growth of character which was all the time going on. Miss Alwyne was right. She had given the plant air and sunshine. It was making its own way now, it would expand into beauty and fragrance by and by. Janita was going to be a woman after all, though not exactly a woman of Aunt Hepzibah's type.

Those weeks passed quietly enough. Miss Alwyne used to disappear soon after breakfast. Where she went, or how she employed her time, Janita could not tell at first. As the clock struck nine she would draw the young girl's couch to the win-

dow, and put a little table with books and work and pictures within reach; then, pressing a kiss upon the thin colourless cheek, she slipped away, and was seen no more until one o'clock, when she came into the room dressed for a walk, looking tired sometimes, but always quiet and peaceful. And Janita, when she got tired of reading, would lean back amongst her cushions, and amuse herself by watching the tide of life that ebbed and flowed through the village.

A very insignificant little tide, but not the less interesting for that. At any rate, it was a brilliant contrast to the prospect from the dining-room window at the Aspens; where nothing could be seen but a square plot of grass, bounded by tall red brick walls, on whose level tops the neighbouring cats used to pace up and down, staring solemnly at her out of their great green eyes. The bay-window of Miss Alwyne's little parlour was directly opposite the church, and commanded a prospect of the village street, past the genteel houses with muslin curtains and brass knockers, away down to the thatched cottages and the old stone bridge that led across the dyke to the St. Olave's road. The gables of the Hall, too, could be clearly seen; and

on quiet days, the cawing of the rooks in the long elm tree walk, heard. Now and then Janita used to see a rustic wedding; the bride walking first, very self-conscious, in a pair of new bonnet strings and white cotton gloves, the bridegroom behind, evidently much at a loss what to do with his elbows, and twisting his head over his shoulder from time to time to see how his coat fitted; for, of course, he had never had it on before. Sometimes, too, there was a funeral, quiet, composed and orderly, as most Meadowthorpe funerals were. You never saw frantic grief in that churchyard. The level monotony of Dykeland seemed to have given its tone to the sorrow of the place, moulding it down to corresponding quietness. Then at twelve the village children came tumbling out of school with a great outcry of jubilant mirth, much kicking and jumping and turning head over heels—at least, amongst the depraved portion of them; the good little girls, who had received instructions to keep their frocks clean, walked steadily home, hand in hand, saying pieces of poetry to each other, as good little girls ought to do, or, perhaps, mentally repeating the multiplication table.

And at regular times Roy used to pass on his

way to and from the Duke's yard, always with that clear carolling whistle of his, and a glance at Professor Ruthven's gable-end window, where there was generally a little bit of white muslin cap to be seen, and a pair of rosy cheeks gleaming through the thick beaten glass which Miss Hepzibah had caused to be put there as a safeguard to domestic morality. Poor Roy! spite of the whistle he looked careworn and anxious still; for times showed no disposition to better themselves, and poor old Mrs. Royland's liver complaint was more obstinate than ever, and shoemaking was very slack, and there seemed little prospect of his being able to come to an understanding with Bessie Ashton. Besides, Bessie *would* keep on walking with Peter Monk, and flirting with Alick the smith, and shaking hands with the tall footman; and if now and then she did stop to have a word with Roy, or give him a tenderer glance than usual out of those deep grey eyes, she was sure to put a stone in the other pocket before long, by passing him in the street with as much indifference as if he had been one of the lower house "fellow-Christians" of Mrs. Narrowby's working-party.


In the afternoon, Miss Alwyne used to disappear

again for a couple of hours ; first, though, winding up the musical-box, which stood in the corner of the room. Then Janita wrapped herself in the great sofa-blanket, and, lulled by the fairy-like cascade of notes, dropped into a pleasant sleep, from which she was roused by a kiss from Miss Alwyne, or the sound of Cicely's voice singing over her work in the kitchen.

But the evenings were the best of all. Oh, those evenings ! It seemed to Janita as if nothing in her past life could compare with them for rest and quietness. For when the daylight had died out, and lights began to twinkle in the cottage windows, and the evening chimes rang out from the church tower, Miss Alwyne used to put her work away, and come to the great easy-chair that stood by the couch ; and Janita used to take fast hold of her hand, and then they would talk—oh ! such long pleasant talks as those were ! Far before any sermons, Janita thought, that she had ever heard in Meadowthorpe church ; at least, she knew this, that they did her very much more good, though other people might not have thought them so suitable, or might have said that Janita was very naughty to prefer those desultory conversa-

tions to a proper discourse, with three heads and an application, such as Mr. Mabury read every Sunday, out of that velvet-covered sermon case of his. And when the little time-piece in the corner told with its peal of merry bells, that ten o'clock had come, Cicely brought in the great bible for reading and prayer; after which Janita went away to her bedroom, where firelight was dancing over the pictured walls, keeping her thoughts company, until sleep with its other pictures came, and the day was lived over again in dreams.

CHAPTER XIX.

O the time went on at Meadowthorpe Cottage, day after day, week after week, until Janita was afraid to think how many had passed, or how soon the former life, with its little worrying cares and vexations, must be taken up again.

Miss Hepzibah had frequently said it was high time her niece went back to the Aspens, she was wasting her time sadly, getting into idle, shiftless ways, no doubt; lying there on the 'sofa from morning to night, playing with her fingers, or reading story-books. That sort of thing must not go on any longer, it must not indeed! But for once Aunt Hepzibah had to yield. Janita should stay where she was until the new year, at any rate, so Miss Alwyne said; and when Miss Alwyne chose, she could always make people do as she said, even Miss Hepzibah.

It was one Wednesday evening, about three weeks after Janita came to the cottage. She was lying on the sofa, holding Miss Alwyne's hand fast in hers. It must be that Miss Alwyne's touch had a sort of magnetism in it, it seemed to quiet the young girl so. Just as the touch of the boy, Gavin Rivers, had charmed away her baby wailings long ago, when he clambered down from the rigging to hold her in his arms, or stroke the tiny face with his sunburnt fingers. The bay-windowed room was dark, but for red firelight and the many-coloured glow which poured through the stained windows of the church. Mr. Mabury always had evening service on Wednesday at seven o'clock. Standing now under the great sycamores by the west door, or pacing up and down the causeway in front of the bishop's summer palace, you might hear the rich full tones of the organ, mingled with Destiny Smith's resonant bass, and Roy's clear ringing tenor. And when they were silent, you might catch Mr. Mabury's voice, richer than either, intoning the prayers. For the rector of Meadowthorpe intoned so beautifully, quite on scientific principles. And people who had any taste or judgment in such matters, said that there was no-

thing to be heard in St. Olave's superior to the service in Mr. Mabury's church, especially during Advent.

An hour ago, Cicely had knocked at the door to know if Miss Alwyne would not have the lamp lighted, and being sent away, had returned to her fellow-servant in the kitchen, saying for the twentieth time since Janita came,

"Laws! how seemly that there room does look of an evening. I always says it's just like a book picter, with such lots of pretty things about, and those two sitting so friendly up again each other, dwelling together in unity, like the blessed psalm, and the ointment which flowed down upon Aaron's beard, though I never could think but what it must have greased his robes shameful, and them so viewly, too, as the clergyman says they was. I don't misdoubt, though, but what it was quite proper."

For Cicely, notwithstanding Miss Alwyne's Sunday evening readings, had somewhat indefinite notions of many parts of Scripture, the 133rd psalm amongst the number.

But the lamp was not wanted to-night. Miss Alwyne and Janita were having one of their long,

long talks, those talks which always used to make the young girl feel so strong for doing and enduring. They had been speaking of a woman's daily life, how its round of petty duties, so small apparently, and meaningless, may be transfigured into beauty by that spirit of consecration which does them all for God, and reads even in the lowliest of them His message to the willing heart. And how, when we have gazed through the telescope of faith upon those great star-lit truths which, far off, light up the darkness of this mortal life, we should never forget that microscope of love, which, turned upon the simplest work that reverent hands can do, shows it adorned with a beauty quite divine.

"I do think," said Janita, "that when I go back to Aunt Hepzibah's, I shall live a new life."

"God grant you may, my child, for the old one was not the right life at all."

"No. And yet for many things, this that I am going to, will be just the same. You know I shall have the same duties to do, and the same people to please, and the same little worries to put up with, only I shall look at them so differently. You did not teach me it all yourself, Miss Alwyne. I

found out a great deal about it in this book," and Janita took from under her cushion one of the popular works of fiction of the day. "This is the little bit I mean. Wasn't it funny to find it in a novel?"

"There is often much wisdom in novels," said Miss Alwyne, quietly.

"I do believe there is, though Aunt Hepzibah calls them foolish and poisonous to the young mind, and all that sort of thing. But just let me read you this little bit."

And turning so that the firelight fell upon her book, Janita began :

"There is nothing great, nothing mean, save as we make it so by our doing of it. All life is given us for one great purpose, the growth of character. It matters little what may be our duties, our pleasures, our cares, so only we grow by them. We live well, not by doing lofty things, but by doing little things with a lofty spirit."

Janita did not see the beautiful smile which came up over Miss Alwyne's face as she read this.

"I do think," she said, "that if I had got nothing else by coming to stop with you but just those few sentences, it would have been worth all

the fret and miserableness of the old life. I would like to thank whoever wrote that."

"You may thank her now, then."

"Yes, of course, by sending her a letter."

"No, not so."

"How then?"

Miss Alwyne stooped down and kissed her.

"You have thanked me already, Janita, by taking those words of mine for your life text. I wrote the book."

"Miss Alwyne!"

And for some time Janita could say no more than that. Miss Alwyne, her dear, quiet, pleasant Miss Alwyne, an authoress? It was so strange. Janita in all her life had never seen a real, live literary lady; but Willie Home had. He knew two or three in Edinburgh when he was there at College, and he had sometimes told her about them, always shrugging up his shoulders before he began, as a child might do when a tame magpie takes unpleasant liberties with its ancles. Willie Home's authoresses were extensive, overpowering women, who tried to dress themselves like men, who talked a great deal about politics, and always had ink stains on their fingers. And, of course, ladies who

wrote books must all be alike. At least Janita thought so.

"Oh, Miss Alwyne, what a pity!" she said at last. She meant it was such a pity that Miss Alwyne was a live authoress. And then, feeling that she had said something which ought not to have been said, she went on.

"I mean, you know—well, I don't quite know what I mean. Only I always thought that people who wrote books, at least, ladies who wrote them, were——"

She was going to say "old and ugly and queer," but she could not get the words out, none of them would at all apply to the gentle, pleasant woman who sat beside her now, the woman whose very life seemed like some beautiful piece of music, without one discordant tone or imperfect chord. And Miss Alwyne had no ink stains on those white taper fingers of hers, and she never talked politics.

"I thought they were—well, peculiar."

"Disagreeable, and odd, and self-conceited, you mean, my dear. Well, I believe that is the opinion generally held of women who follow literature as a profession; and yet I do not know why it should be so. I don't see why a woman need lose anything

of her womanhood by writing for the amusement or instruction of other women. I think it is quite as reputable for a lady to get her living by writing, as by teaching music or drawing ; and infinitely more reputable than to get it, as many women do, by marrying men for whom they do not care."

"Do you get a living by writing, Miss Alwyne?"

"Yes. It is a long time now since I had any one to work for me, any one to give me the help which women generally get from husbands or brothers or fathers. I have none to depend upon but myself, and I have chosen this way of gaining a livelihood, as the quietest and most womanly."

"And yet there is a prejudice against women who write."

"There is, on the part of foolish, unthinking people. Some time ago there was a prejudice against women who got their living by wood-engraving or law-copying, or any other handicraft. That has passed away now. So will the other, by and by."

"But, Miss Alwyne, you said it was a womanly occupation. Now I always thought it was just the other way."

“Yes, womanly. For women whose time is at their own disposal, who have no home duties to fill up the long, long hours of every day, no little children to care for and live for—women, too, who must in some way sustain themselves, I think writing is of all employments the quietest. It does not, unless they choose, bring them into contact with other people. There is nothing in it which need jar upon the retirement which every woman prizes so dearly. She may be doing a noble work in the world, comforting many a sad heart, willing away many a weary hour—for, Janita, I think that even the gift of amusing is no small gift—and yet all the time she need never stir from her own fireside, or from the quiet of her native village.

“As for the womanliness of it,” Miss Alwyne continued, seeing that Janita still looked doubtful, “that a woman should write for other women, seems to me such a simple, natural thing, that I cannot help wondering at all the argumentation which has been spent upon the subject. If only the world would let us alone. If only when we are trying to help ourselves in our own quiet, unassuming way, there was not such a legion of reviewers and lecturers and pamphleteers down

upon us directly, hunting us to death with their good advice, or their sympathy, or their sarcasm, or their scorn. Men reproach single women for being a burden upon society, and when the single women strive to lighten that burden by helping themselves, the reproach, instead of being taken away, becomes louder."

"I don't think I should care for reproach," said Janita, "if I knew I was doing my own work, and doing it as it ought to be done. I wonder if I shall ever find my work in writing. You know you have told me before that there is a work for everyone. And I feel sometimes as if I *must* do something, as if I could not live on and die, leaving no mark upon the world."

Miss Alwyne looked at the young face uplifted to her now, so quick with thought-life, so earnest, so full of questioning, so pure from the touch of wearing grief, yet quivering with that sensitiveness, which, when grief came, would feel it so keenly. And as she remembered her own life, the steps very rough and painful by which she had been led into the track where now she walked peacefully along, she prayed that He who gives to all their work, would not so guide Janita; that He would find

some smoother path for those young feet. But there was no need to tell Janita all that. She only answered in that grave, sweet voice of hers, and one might be content with much pain to win the peace which made that voice so sweet:—

“My child, your work lies close at hand. See God's purpose for you in the simplest duties of your daily life. Fulfilling these with reverent care, you are doing His will, surely the highest, noblest thing which can be done. And if that will should one day meet you as a cross, heavy and hard to bear, carry it bravely, carry it patiently. It is but for a little while. And there is no cross so borne, which He who gave it will not, sooner or later, exchange for an eternal crown.”

CHAPTER XX.



UT it does not follow, because a woman has found her work in the world, and is trying to do it steadily, in a quiet, unobtrusive fashion, that the world will let her alone in that work, or leave her to do it in her own way. Least of all had Gentility Square any notion of letting people alone. It was one of the last things they ever did. Indeed they would have thought it very improper, quite a breach of religious duty, to abstain from meddling with everything and everybody that came within the range of their observation.

Miss Alwyne had resided in Meadowthorpe nearly three years before she was suspected of the enormity of writing for the press. Up to that period she had been believed in and respected as a

quiet maiden lady, who, being in delicate health, had sunk her property and got a nice little annuity for it ; or who, being well connected, had a pension from some of her great friends, which, added to her own earnings—for everyone knew she had once been a governess—brought in enough to keep her genteelly. At any rate there was something about her so self-possessed and almost aristocratic, that she was admitted into the best society of the place, went once a year to dine with Mrs. Macturk, took tea as often with the rector's lady, lunched with the bishop at his summer palace now and then, used to visit the steward when there was a steward to be visited, and was generally invited to the Misses Vere Aubrey's annual tea-party at Christmas. Also, she was moved to in the street by everybody who was anybody, the canon's widow amongst the rest.

Great, then, was the well-bred horror of Gentility Square when it found out that the neatest and compactest of its tenements had been harbouring a woman who wrote. The report was first mentioned at Mrs. Narrowby's working party—of course Miss Alwyne was not there—by Mrs. Maguire, the physician's lady, who had it from

Mrs. Mabury, who had been told it in the strictest confidence by a friend at St. Olave's who had heard it mentioned by a lady whose husband had been told by the librarian of the Athenæum; and the librarian had had it from the bookseller, and the bookseller had had it from a traveller who was connected with one of the great publishing houses in London. So that the pedigree of the report was unexceptionable, very much more so than Miss Alwyne's conduct.

Mrs. Maguire came to the working party quite oppressed with the magnitude of the intelligence she had to communicate. For several days previously, in fact, ever since Mrs. Mabury, who was confined to the rectory with influenza, had sent across a little note containing the important information, Mrs. Maguire had been debating in her own mind how best to break it to the members of the upper house; whether by a series of gentle hints leading to the final catastrophe, or by a decisive avowal of that catastrophe without preface of any kind, or by judicious inuendoes which should gradually prepare the Gablehouse ladies to receive, without too great a shock, the news which it was only proper they should be put in possession

of. Finally, however, she decided upon the bold avowal, trusting to Providence to keep the house from going into hysterics. Accordingly, when the unbleached calico had been circulated amongst the fellow-Christians, and the reading was about to begin, Mrs. Maguire said in a quiet matter of fact voice, ostensibly addressed to the upper house, but loud enough to be heard by all—

“Ladies, are you aware that Miss Alwyne writes novels?”

And then, having got the subject fairly launched, Mrs. Maguire heaved a sigh of relief and continued her stitching.

If, to use an original expression, a thunderbolt had fallen at their feet, the worthy members of the Meadowthorpe working party could not have been more shocked and startled. A few of them had vague general notions about female writers; women who brushed all the hair back from their foreheads, and were not particular about the entireness of their husband's stockings; women who left the tapes and buttons to fate, whilst they sat in their studies filling sheets of foolscap with moral maxims, Helps, Suggestions, Aids, Whispers, and the like. And when told of that very interesting

story by Miss A., or that fascinating novel by Mrs. B., or that exquisite tale by Lady C., they had shaken their heads, and whilst glad enough to avail themselves of the amusement afforded by such books, had talked sweetly about feminine seclusion, and the womanly virtues of retirement and silence. But that one of the species should actually have entered their quiet village, and under the disguise of an inoffensive maiden lady, penetrated their homes, doubtless with a view to taking notes for publication—it was enough to overwhelm the community with righteous indignation. It was—it was—but in that first shock of surprise no one could tell exactly what it was.

The house resolved itself into a committee, and a second working party was appointed for the following week, to consider the subject more fully. Then the upper class members gave their opinions. The others could say what they had to say at home; it was not their place to talk at the working party.

The Misses Vere Aubrey were very much shocked. They could not have thought such a thing of the lady who lived at Meadowthorpe cottage. And Miss Matilda felt it nothing but due to her sex to withdraw from the acquaintance of a

person who had so trespassed upon its sanctity. Miss Hepzibah lifted up her hands in astonishment. What *would* the world come to ! Things were very different when *she* was a girl. She was sure *her* mother would never have let her do such a thing, that she would not. And then the Professor's sister thanked Providence that she was not as other women were.

Mrs. Macturk was more than astonished, she was indignant. It was her opinion that the Duke ought to be told about it. His Grace knew what became the female character as well as any man, and she was convinced he would not permit a woman who wrote novels to remain on his estate. It was obnoxious, quite ; enough to lower the tone of the village. At all events, Miss Alwyne ought not to be allowed to come to the Sacrament again, and if no one else mentioned it to Mr. Mabury, she should feel it upon her conscience to tell him herself.

The Misses Narrowby, one and all, were filled with mild surprise. It was so very strange. They really did not know what to think. And they asked each other what they ought to think, and they consulted the Guide to Female Excellence as

to what was proper for young ladies to think ; but the Guide, &c., wonderful to say, had not a paragraph on that subject ; and then they asked their mamma what would be best to think, and mamma said she really did not know what would be the most judicious way of thinking ; but she was quite sure of one thing—it was a great comfort to her that *her* young people did not commit themselves in that way. And then the Misses Narrowby felt very good, quite overflowing with propriety. And they told their mamma that they hoped they should never so far forget themselves and what was due to their sex, as to give her any anxiety of *that* sort.

All this was said and thought, whilst poor Miss Alwyne, innocently unconscious, was living as heretofore a quiet, and, as she believed, perfectly harmless life ; going to see the village people now and then, wiling away the evening hours with books and needlework, tending her ferns and flowers, or, if she had anything to write about, writing it—doing her duty so far as she knew it, in that station of life in which it had pleased the Almighty to place her. But by and by, dribblets of the current gossip began to find their way into Meadowthorpe

cottage, and its tenant began to be addressed after the following fashion—

“You know, Miss Alwyne, I am a person that always speaks my mind” (it was Mrs. Macturk), “and as soon as Mrs. Maguire mentioned it to me, I determined I would come across to you at once, and really hear it from your own lips. Now, will you tell me,—as a friend, you know,—*is* it true that you publish?”

Or it was Miss Vere Aubrey, with her stately Norman step, and her icy Norman smile, who way-laid Miss Alwyne in Meadowthorpe lane, and had heard that she spent such a great deal of time in that elegant little conservatory room of hers, and pray was the new book to come out *very* soon, and would Miss Alwyne be so kind as to say what it was to be called.

And then, before Miss Vere Aubrey was well disposed of, Mrs. Mabury came sailing across the road.

“You are quite sure you will not be offended, dear Miss Alwyne, but *is* it really true that there is a work of yours in the St. Olave’s library? Do you know, I was so astonished when I heard it, and I said I was quite sure you would never think

of doing such a thing ; only you see reports get about so, and I thought it would be so very much better to mention it to you at once, because I was perfectly sure——”

With a great deal more to the same effect. And scarcely had poor Miss Alwyne got safely home, when another of the Gentry Square people dropped in, and after the weather had been discussed, and last Sunday's sermon set to rights, and the plague of servants talked over, up came the ubiquitous subject.

“I am quite sure, Miss Alwyne, you will believe me when I say that there isn't a person in the parish who has a greater objection to gossip than myself, and I am sure I always set my face against anything of the kind, and have done so from the beginning ; and as for spreading a false report, it is one of the last things I should ever think of doing. And so, as soon as ever it was mentioned to me, I said I would ask you myself, because then I could deny it from your own lips. Now, Miss Alwyne, *is it true*—you must not be offended with me, you know, because I am sure I ask the question out of the purest kindness—but

is it true that you are in the habit of writing for the press?"

And Mrs. Maguire's uplifted eyebrows, and the general solemnity of her aspect, abundantly declared what a very pernicious "habit" she considered it to be.

To all of which inquiries Miss Alwyne replied, not without a certain dignity of voice and manner, that she *did* write for the press, and that she had done so for many years, and should do so whilst health and talent were spared to her; moreover, that, so far from being ashamed of the employment, she considered it one of the most suitable to which a woman, from whom God had withholden the true woman's life of home duty, could devote herself. And having said this, there was a steadfast look in Miss Alwyne's face, which said plainly enough—

"There; you have your answer; now be silent."

And the gossips were silent accordingly. For that way of Miss Alwyne's was very conclusive. Gentility Square dare no more have offended the Duke himself than vexed the lady of Meadowthorpe cottage after that quiet settling look of hers.

So that blew over. For a few Sundays she was very much looked at in church, and the people peeped at her from behind the window curtains as she went down the street. And little Mrs. Brown, the grocer's wife, made one or two private visits to the washerwoman, to know whether Miss Alwyne's things were made as nicely and particularly as other people's, and whether it was really true that her stockings were mended so beautifully you could not see where the hole had been. Which questions being answered in the affirmative, little Mrs. Brown said there was no telling but what women who wrote, might get to heaven as easily as those who did not. But as far as Miss Alwyne herself was concerned, no one mentioned the subject to her any more.

Remonstrances came from other quarters, though, which she could not so easily dismiss. Vulgar curiosity, whether manifested by the little Mrs. Browns or Miss Vere Aubreys of society, might be put down by a quiet look; but conscientious scruples were not to be dealt with in that way. And amongst Miss Alwyne's friends were some good, well-meaning people, who thought that by the evil practice of novel-writing she was perilling

her own eternal interests, as well as leading unwary souls to destruction along the flowery paths of fictitious literature.

These remonstrances, however, did not come from Mr. Mabury. Mrs. Macturk certainly had carried out her threat of speaking to him on the subject of Miss Alwyne's departure from the path of rectitude ; but the rector of Meadowthorpe, like Gallio, cared for none of these things. He listened politely to what the rich widow had to say, sent for Miss Alwyne's last book from the St. Olave's library, read it through and pronounced it a capital story, only rather overburdened with reflections. He could not say that he should like Mrs. Mabury to write books, but if other ladies chose to do so, they were welcome. He should not consider it binding upon his pastoral conscience to interfere with them. So that Mrs. Macturk might as well have been quiet.

Good old Dr. Hewlet, of St. Olave's, who had known Miss Alwyne ever since her residence in Meadowthorpe, thought more seriously on the subject. After prayerful consideration, he resolved upon an interview with the talented but misguided lady, who was, as he feared, ruining both

herself and others by the exercise of perverted gifts.

Accordingly, he drove over to Meadowthorpe one pleasant summer evening, about a month after Mrs. Mabury had sent that little note across to the physician's lady. He found Miss Alwyne sitting alone in her parlour, arranging some flowers to send to a poor woman who had been bedridden for many weeks. She did not look at all like a child of the evil one, a destroyer of souls; quite the contrary. Dr. Hewlet thought he had seldom seen a sweeter face than that which was lifted to his as he went into the quiet little room. But then, as the good canon said to himself, even the arch enemy sometimes assumes the guise of an angel of light.

After a fatherly greeting—for Dr. Hewlet loved Miss Alwyne very much—and after a few general observations on the weather and the state of the parish, he ventured into the subject which had brought him to Meadowthorpe.

“My dear friend,” he began, “do not fancy me actuated by a spirit of curiosity, still less of censoriousness. No one is more anxious than myself to speak the truth in love. But tell me, is it really

true that you are in the habit of writing works of fiction?"

"Quite true, Dr. Hewlet."

But this time there was nothing in Miss Alwyne's voice which seemed to imply, "You have got your answer, now be silent." She said the words so quietly and gently, that Dr. Hewlet felt encouraged to proceed.

"Ah! I had hoped it was only a false report, one of the idle tales which idle people love to spread. But now will you let me ask you how you can reconcile it with your profession as a Christian woman to spend so large an amount of time in the production of works of fiction?"

"I am not surprised at your asking me that question. I know good earnest people have a great prejudice against these books; why so, they would perhaps find it difficult to say. When circumstances led me to choose work of some kind, I asked myself whether I could with a clear conscience devote my life, so long as God gave it me, to the writing of stories, against which so much has been said. That question cost me many doubts once. It costs me none now."

"Ah! but, Miss Alwyne," and Dr. Hewlet shook

his head; it grieved him to find his friend entrench herself so firmly in the position she had taken up, "may not that be because you are given over to blindness and hardness of heart? The voice of all professing Christians is against you."

"That would not influence me in the least, Dr. Hewlet. When a question is once decided between God and our own consciences, professing Christians have nothing at all to do with it. To our own Master we stand or fall, not to the judgment of professing Christians. I have this power, and I must use it."

"Oh, yes, by all means. I do not deny that writing is a very useful gift. Be assured I have no sympathy with the foolish prejudice often expressed against authoresses; that prejudice is ignorant in the extreme. But could you not turn your talents into a more useful channel? A channel quite as productive too, in a pecuniary point of view? Now those sweet little books that obtain such an extensive sale, those Morning and Evening Portions, my bookseller tells me that Portions are eagerly sought after by the religious public; and then you know there are the 'Dewdrops' and 'Crumbs of Comfort.' Anything in that form

commands popularity at once. Could you not bring out something of that kind? Would it not be a more useful application of your talents?"

"Dr. Hewlet," and Miss Alwyne's face was full of quiet, steady decision as she spoke; perhaps, also, there was the faintest little touch of humour in her voice, "I believe that in writing as I do write, I am as much fulfilling God's purpose for me, as if I were publishing 'Crumbs of Comfort' at so much a packet, or drenching the religious public with sixpenny 'Dewdrops,' such as you see put out on the counters of evangelical booksellers. Some people have a gift for writing 'Dewdrops,' some have not. We are not all called to the same work. If we do faithfully what the Great Taskmaster gives us to do, that is all He asks of us."

"Certainly it is. Duty, that should be the watchword of every life. And I admire the courage and perseverance, which, if report be true, you have shown in overcoming obstacles, and finding for yourself place and work in the world. But, my dear Miss Alwyne, *novels*, I could almost call them those devil's books—novels, my dear Miss Alwyne."

Miss Alwyne smiled, though the good Doctor

did not intend her to do anything of the sort.

"Will you tell me now," she said, "the names of a few books which you consider as fair samples of Satanic literature? At present, my memory does not furnish me with any."

"Oh, yes. I can give you the names of numbers of novels. There is 'The Romance of the Forest,' very popular, very popular, indeed; and the 'Farmer of Something,' I forget the exact name, and 'The Brigand of Venice,' and 'The Gallant Highwayman,' and 'Jack Sheppard.' All highly popular works of fiction. I read a paragraph only yesterday, to the effect that a recently convicted murderer traced his first steps in the career of crime to the intense craving for excitement which was roused in him by the reading of 'Jack Sheppard!'"

"And so, because 'Jack Sheppard,' a book I have never heard of until now, happens to be called a novel, you rank all other works of the same name in the same class. That is not fair, Doctor Hewlet. Now I don't suppose you will contradict me when I say that some of the best thinking of the present day is found in the pages of magazines and journals. According to your

theory, you ought to deny such books a place on your table, because certain other publications, reeking with filth and infidelity, but still bearing the names of journals and magazines, circulate in the back slums of our great cities. The names are the same, why not the contents also?"

The Doctor paused for a little while, not being prepared with a reply.

"But, my dear Miss Alwyne, though your argument appears to carry weight with it, still, if such books are not absolutely vicious—and be assured I would not for one moment insinuate that you write anything which fails of having the purest moral tendency—still the very sound of the word *novel* implies something vain and frivolous, and it grieves me that you should spend your time in adding to the already too long list of such works."

"Did you ever read one of my novels?"

"Oh, Miss Alwyne, excuse me," and Dr. Hewlet put out his hand with a very deprecatory gesture. "I—I am no novel reader. I should consider that quite at variance with my profession. I—in fact I make it a point of conscience never to open a work of that kind. It is against my principles, it is indeed."

"Then let me say that I think you are condemning me without evidence. I could never spend a day of my life in writing as I do, if I did not think that novels may do as much good to those who read them, as avowedly serious books do to avowedly serious people. People who meet religious thought in no other form, meet it sometimes in novels."

"Well, in a limited sense that may be true; but you will certainly admit that there is nothing *saving* in novels."

"I believe that all true, earnest, God-given thought has in it something saving, though not perhaps in the sense you mean. And I believe, too, that many men and women are as truly consecrated to their work of writing, as ministers of the church are to their work of preaching; yes, and far more so than the surpliced fop who has only taken orders for the sake of a respectable social position, or because his relatives have a living in their gift"

"Yes, that is too true," and Dr. Hewlet glanced at an elaborate white neck-tie which was just passing the little bay window. "Many are put into the priest's office for a morsel of bread. But

that does not alter the truth of my argument. Preaching is attended with beneficial results, though not, I grant, to the extent we might expect, owing perhaps to the unfaithfulness of the Church; but who ever heard of good being done by novel reading? If you can give me a single instance of strength or comfort afforded by books of this kind, I will take back what I have said. I will own that you are doing a true work."

"You force me to speak of myself, Dr. Hewlet, and so if I do it, you must bear with me. People who are utter strangers to me, people whose faces I have never seen, and most likely never shall see, tell me of comfort which has come to them through words of mine. They speak of grief lightened and suffering borne more patiently through strength which they have thus unconsciously gained. If I had no other need to work, I would work for this, to reach out a helping hand to women who are toiling over a path whose ruggedness I have known and felt. Whilst I can do this, I will go on, let professing Christians say what they will against me. And so long as one voice is lifted up to thank me, and so long as I can cheer a single heart, I will

not believe that my work is other than God-given. Will you?"

Dr. Hewlet could not say. He sat there in the little bay window, looking across to the churchyard sycamores, upon whose mossed trunks evening sunlight was casting the shadows of their leaves. Miss Alwyne sat at the table arranging her flowers, a look of deep quiet-hearted content upon her face, the look of one who believes in her life as the gift of heaven, and uses it as such. She was the first to speak after that long silence.

"You have come to me, Dr. Hewlet, in all kindness, to warn me from what you think a dangerous path. But nothing will ever shake my faith in this, that I am doing my own work, and doing it as God would have it done. I do not profess to write for men; that is no woman's work. But there is much in a woman's life which only a woman can know and understand. You may preach to them out of your cathedral pulpits of patience and resignation, and you may teach them schemes of doctrine and duty which you have learned from theological books; but there are needs which you can never reach, and sufferings for which no college lore of yours can ever find com-


fort ; and God has given to woman the power to reach these, and it is your praise she should win, and not your censure, when she tries to do it humbly and faithfully."

Dr. Hewlet rose from his seat in the window. He came up to her now and took both her hands in his.

"Miss Alwyne, pardon me. I have misunderstood you. I thought that your calling was at variance with my own. I believe now that we are walking side by side in the same path, serving the same master, some day to win the same reward."

She felt that long ago. But she was not the less glad to hear him say it. After that, the bond between them became closer. Dr. Hewlet went away. He had intended in his prayers that evening to offer a petition for the beloved sister, whose feet were stumbling upon the dark mountains ; that the thought of her heart might be forgiven her, and that God would pluck her as a brand from the burning. But he changed his mind, and instead, thanked the great Father of all for that faithful band of workers to whom, though now unknown and unacknowledged, He would one day say, "Well done."

CHAPTER XXI.

UT Janita's evenings were not all spent in quiet talks with Miss Alwyne, or in storing up great thoughts for the after toil and weariness of life, if these should ever come to her. Other interests of quite a different nature were pushing themselves into existence at Meadowthorpe cottage during that three months' visit.

After a suitable interval, when Dr. Maguire had given it as his opinion that there could be no possible danger of infection, Mrs. Narrowby honoured Meadowthorpe cottage with a visit. The call was ostensibly paid to Miss Alwyne, and related to the case of a poor man in the parish who wanted relieving with a blanket ticket ; but other ends quite apart from parish business, or blanket tickets, were to be answered by it.

It could not with any sort of truth be affirmed concerning the mistress of Gablehouse, that, like Una, her presence made sunshine in the shady place. Indeed, she rather seemed to reverse the process, bringing shadow where before there had been sunshine. A fact Janita could not help noting as Mrs. Narrowby's ample black silk dress rustled into the bay-windowed room that frosty evening in December, breaking in upon such a pleasant conversation, which she and Miss Alwyne were having all to themselves.

The visitor was very polite and ceremonious. As occupying the van of respectability in Meadowthorpe parish, Mrs. Narrowby was never anything else but polite and ceremonious; she considered it due to her position. Just before going away she suggested that her girls should come and sit with Janita in an evening now and then.

"Just to enliven you a little, my dear. You know it is very depressing to be so much alone, especially for young people; and I am sure the girls would be so very happy to do anything in their power for you. Indeed they were only saying the other day they should so like to know a little more of Miss Raeburn."

To which Miss Raeburn was obliged to say that it was very kind of Mrs. Narrowby, and she should be exceedingly happy to cultivate the acquaintance of Miss Narrowbys; though she could not help thinking that Miss Alwyne's conversation was quite as enlivening as anything she should be likely to hear from the feminine portion of the Gablehouse establishment. But Janita was a little bit spiteful in that opinion. She had never quite forgiven the eldest Miss Narrowby for coming all the way across the drawing-room to ask, in a perfectly audible voice, if she found the piece of tacked hemming too difficult.

Miss Selina came in next evening. Came not alone, for the Guide, &c., said it was improper for young females to go out after dark unattended, and therefore Selina brought her brother, by way of guard, as she explained to Miss Alwyne.

The young architect did not come unwillingly. He had a bright remembrance of that working party evening, and evidently enjoyed another opportunity of getting half an hour's uninterrupted conversation with one who could understand and appreciate him, and listen intelligently too, as Janita did. Certainly there was much that was

very engaging about Longden Narrowby. He had no conceit, no self-assertion. This, though it might prevent him from pushing his way in the world, rendered him very agreeable as a companion. And then he had not been thrown very much into the society of other young men, so that if he lacked manliness he lacked also the brusquerie and overweening confidence which very much rubbing and scrubbing in the world are apt to produce. He lived a quiet, secluded sort of life, studying his profession, which, in itself had a refining influence, and spending most of his leisure time in sketching or reading poetry—sometimes writing it. Longden seemed to have got by mistake into the Narrowby family, like those blue convolvuluses, which straggling over the hedge into Miss Hepzibah's kitchen garden, twined their graceful tendrils amongst the cabbages and cauliflowers which were the rightful occupants of the ground ; for there was a fanciful romance about him, a graceful ideality which contrasted strangely enough with the matter of fact sobriety of his sisters, or the hard, dry practicality of his father and mother.

Janita liked to talk to him, to listen to his voice, which was low and sweet, just the voice to trill out

love ballads ; and to lean back amongst her cushions and get a look now and then at his face, which seemed made to match the room, it was so still and refreshing in its beauty, like that picture of the boy Milton, which hung in her bedroom at Inverallan Manse.

And then she began to wonder whether the Inverallan life, with its moorland rambles, and its boating afternoons on the loch, and its evening readings in the bright, trim little study, was indeed better or more enjoyable than this new life that was beginning to tide up round about her. For when the evening was over, and Selina Narrowby had said good night, and Longden had held her hand lingeringly in his, white as any lady's, and smiled that beautiful smile of his, Janita felt as if she had been listening for a long time to some very sweet music. She felt quieted and soothed, not grandly content as when Miss Alwyne had been talking to her, but only quieted. There was this difference between Miss Alwyne and Longden Narrowby. Her thoughts were like Beethoven's chorales, whose harmony wakes in you strange longings which you cannot understand or fathom, you only feel that the music has overflowed you

and borne you up to a higher life. Longden's were like some sweet song which you comprehend at once, which leaves nothing unsaid, which wakes no new thoughts, but only chimes in pleasantly with those you possess already.

After the ice was once broken, young Narrowby used often to call at the Cottage in an evening, when office work was over. It was very easy to make excuses for such visits. Selina had sent back a borrowed book ; he had just finished a pencil sketch, and would like to have Miss Raeburn's opinion about it ; there was such a lovely poem in the Magazine for January, he could not resist coming in to read it aloud to them ; or Mr. Narrowby had been making some new designs for cottage gardens in the village, and he thought perhaps Miss Alwyne would like to look over them ; or there was some little message which his sisters were too busy to bring, and he offered to come in with it. So that before long, young Mr. Narrowby spent at least two or three evenings a week in that pretty little bay-windowed room, with Miss Alwyne and Janita, sometimes with Janita only. And as it was dark when he came, the gossips of Gentility Square never knew anything about his visits, not

even the Misses Vere Aubrey, who had hawk-like keenness of vision in detecting any approach to "marked attentions." Besides, the Cottage door was never locked until bed-time, so that with the delightful free-and-easy familiarity of country life, Longden could lift the latch and ensconce himself in the easy chair without giving Ann or Cicely the trouble of letting him in ; which was so very convenient.

At first the young man thought he went because it was so pleasant to have a little sensible conversation instead of being bored to death with the eternal parish talk of his sisters, who seemed to have no interests apart from the working party or the clothing society. By and by it was enough to sit within sight of Janita's bright face, even though there was no conversation at all. Then—but what need to go through it all ?—how those great brown eyes, now sparkling with merriment, now laden with thought, stole far away down into his heart and followed him home, and glanced between him and the pale unchanging faces of his three sisters, and looked out upon him from the folios of architectural drawings and estimates of the Duke's build-ings ; and how Janita's sweet voice kept always

sounding in his ears—that voice which, whether it talked sense or nonsense, was the dearest he had ever heard, the only one he ever cared to hear. Oh, it is an old story, and people can all tell it for themselves, how such things as these come about, and how susceptible young men, men who have aspirations, and whose sisters cannot sympathise with them, do lose their hearts, getting thereby into all manner of trouble. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever will be, so long as there are Janita Raeburns and Longden Narrowbys in the world.

But Longden's lost heart, for it really was lost after about a fortnight's visiting at the Cottage, did not seem likely at present to cost him any very serious trouble. His own family did not make any objection to his dropping in so frequently next door. Indeed they rather encouraged it than otherwise. Mrs. Narrowby had talked it all over with her husband one evening when the girls were out, long before Janita had ever been invited to the working party; and they had settled it in their own minds that Longden could not do better for himself than pay attention in that quarter. Otherwise Janita would never have been included in Miss Hepzibah's monthly note of invitation. Or-

phans were convenient, as Mrs. Narrowby said, looked at in a matrimonial point of view, because there were no wife's relations dangling about and meddling in matters which did not belong to them. And this particular orphan was sure of having a snug little property, because neither the Professor nor Miss Hepzibah were marrying people. So that on the whole the lad could not do a better thing for himself.

Thus Mrs. Narrowby. As for Longden, to do him justice, he really did love Janita for herself, without any ulterior views towards money matters and mothers-in-law. She was the only woman he had ever wished to have for his wife, the only one he had ever loved, except indeed about half a dozen enchanting syrens who had floated past him at the St. Olave's balls, dazzling him with their white shoulders and sparkling smiles ; betraying him also into sundry sonnets, all of which, however, were burnt and forgotten long ago, leaving his affections quite tenantless, until this Janita came stealing into them. This little Inverallan girl, who had such pretty ways, so different to the rest of the Meadowthorpe young ladies.

True, he had not said anything yet. He had

not pledged himself, nor come to the point. But he quite meant to do so before long; for Longden Narrowby, like all other honourable young men, thought it was a very naughty thing to possess himself of a lady's affections without giving her a receipt for the same in the shape of a formal offer. But for the present, the sweet romance of uncertainty was so delightful. It was like looking out upon some wide landscape in summer time, while yet the early morning mist is folding it round, while purple cloud and purple mountain meet and mingle, while there are no hard, sharp lines to be seen, no prosaic high roads, no matter-of-fact hedges or productive turnip fields; but all is sunlit, hazy deliciousness. If he "said anything" to Miss Raeburn, the next thing would be, where should they take a house, and how many servants should they keep? And that for a young man of Longden's ideal tastes was so very commonplace. He really could not take *that* into consideration at present. Just fancy him, now, as he said to himself about a month after Janita came to the Cottage, scouring the streets of St. Olave's in search of furniture, or hovering about the carpet shops, and haggling with brokers over

the price of a bronze fender for the back parlour—no, it was entirely too matter of fact. Let him look at the silver mist and the purple cloud a little longer, then it would be time enough to descend to the turnip-field and hedge-rows.

Longden said as much as this to his mother, for he was a dutiful lad, and always consulted his parents about anything important. Mrs. Narrowby thought her son's opinion quite correct, though she looked at the matter from a different point of view. It was very much better that Longden should not commit himself by "saying anything" just yet. The young lady was not engaged to any one in Scotland, so Miss Hepzibah had told Mrs. Narrowby for a fact; and Mrs. Narrowby was quite sure she was not engaged to anyone in Meadowthorpe, for the very sufficient reason that there was nobody except her own son to be engaged to. Besides, they were both of them young, and Longden was not yet in receipt of a very large salary from the Duke; and as Miss Raeburn's property would not come to her until Professor Ruthven's death, and he was a tough, stringy old man, who might last for years, there was no immediate prospect of their being able to settle. And long engagements were

so very undesirable, especially in a village where everybody knew all about everything that was going on. It was better, therefore, to wait, much better.

That was what Mrs. Narrowby said to Longden, as the young man stood playing with his fingers in the dining-room one January evening, after a lengthy visit next door, a visit during which he had been reading poetry to Janita, and translating the love passages in "Wallenstein," and looking tenderly into those deep brown eyes of hers, and in various other ways making himself agreeable. And then she counselled prudence, and said what a foolish thing it was for young men to entangle themselves before they had a speedy prospect of settling; and though she should have every satisfaction in receiving Miss Raeburn as a daughter-in-law, still it would be better to wait a little while, say three or four months, before he pledged himself to anything decisive.

But there was another reason for delay, which Mrs. Narrowby did not mention to her son, as he stood there in the dining-room, playing with his fingers, after that lengthy visit next door; a reason which the judicious mamma had been turning over

in her own mind ever since those workmen from London took the measurement of the south front of the Hall, preparatory to breaking out a conservatory in the great drawing-room.

It only wanted a few weeks now to the time when the new steward was to arrive—March, at the very latest, so Mr. Andrews, the clerk of the works, said, and he was the most likely man to know. Nobody could tell who he was, or even his name—the Duke was so provokingly close about business affairs—but this much Mrs. Narrowby found out, that he had already been steward on some of the Duke of Dykeland's southern estates, and, therefore, must be a man of position, most likely, too, a middle-aged man. All the previous stewards had been men well advanced in years. And he might, nay, most likely he would, have grown-up daughters. That was the contingency upon which Mrs. Narrowby had fixed her hopes, hopes which put her into quite a quiver of pleasurable excitement whenever she suffered herself to dwell upon them. If there should be daughters, and if her son should be fortunate enough to win one of them, then——

It would be so *very* satisfactory for Longden to marry into the Hall family; such a good connection, besides making the young man's fortune in a pecuniary point of view. True, the young lady might not have so much unencumbered fortune as Janita Raeburn, but then the patronage was so important. For it was well known that the steward, if he was a clever man, had all the places on the estate at his disposal, and could influence the Duke considerably, too, in fixing salaries and emoluments. And in that case it would be so very much better for Longden not to have committed himself to Miss Raeburn. As the affair was now, he could slip quietly out of it without any remark, without exposing himself to even a suspicion of dishonourableness.

Oh! Mrs. Narrowby, how strange that your penetration did not reach to the other side of the subject. Supposing this myth of a steward, whose name no one has heard, but whom everyone believes in as a middle-aged man, of good property and connections, should have sons only, instead of daughters, in that probable family of his, and that one of them should take a fancy to the bright little Inverallan girl. More unlikely things have

happened, and will happen again to the end of time. For she is a winning creature, apart from that funded property of the Professor's, which would buy Longden such a nice practice somewhere, besides paying rent and butcher's bills; and though not absolutely beautiful, she has a way about her that steals unawares into people's hearts. As it has stolen into your son's heart, filling that heart with hopes and imaginings, which, though as yet they do not embrace possible domestic arrangements, are sufficient to make life very beautiful.

But Mrs. Narrowby's penetration did not reach to the other side of the subject. Somehow she felt, how or why she could not tell, but she did feel that the new steward's family would consist of daughters. And that was the position of affairs when the time drew near for Janita to return to Aunt Hepzibah.

CHAPTER XXII.



JANITA had not yet asked herself how much of the pleasure of that three months' visit to Miss Alwyne had been owing to young Mr. Narrowby's frequent calls, and the long, long talks they used to have together in the cozy little bay-windowed parlour. She was not in the habit of pulling her feelings up by the roots to see why they grew. That she was happy, happy in her own free innocent girlish way—that was all she knew, and all she cared to know. *Why* she was happy, and what sort of happiness it was, and how long it was likely to last, and whether it *was* real happiness, or only a sort of pleasurable feeling consequent upon kindness and returning health—these questions Janita wisely let alone. It would be better for half the people in the world if they would do the same.

Longden Narrowby was a very agreeable companion, the pleasantest she had ever known, not excepting even Willie Home; for Willie, though frank and honest and good-natured, lacked that elegance of taste which Longden possessed in a remarkable degree. Still she was conscious of a want. This new friendship satisfied that part of her nature which sought after the beautiful and the graceful, the rest was left unfed. Longden Narrowby had no power over her. As she used to say to Miss Alwyne sometimes, and perhaps she could not have expressed her thought in better words—there wasn't plenty of him. She rarely found herself asking his opinion about anything. But he was constantly consulting her. Not merely appealing to her taste—almost any man may appeal to almost any woman on that subject, and find himself the better for it—but he rested on her judgment, and he formed his own opinions by it. And Janita could not help seeing this. And no woman ever gives her whole heart, with all its reverence and trust, to a man who confesses himself moulded by her ways of thinking. She is in the right not to do that.

But as I said before, Janita had not begun to

question herself on this subject. And if she had, the result would not seriously have affected her peace of mind. She liked well enough to talk to Longden Narrowby, to look over his sketch-book, to suggest improvements, which he often asked her to do, in his plans for cottage gardens, to discuss their favourite poets, and to listen to his graceful thoughts. But she felt no great blank when he was gone. The hours never wearied slowly on because he was not there to speed their flight. Her heart never beat faster when his gentle, womanlike knock was heard, neither when he left her did the sunshine seem to have died off from every place where he was not. If some one had come in and told her that Longden was going to be married to one of the Meadowthorpe young ladies, she would—well, perhaps she would have felt just a little bit cast down, and she might have sat in thoughtful silence for half an hour after the gossip had done, and she might have had one twinge of sadness to think that the pleasant readings were over now, and the long evening talks. But no more than that. She would have been all right again next morning, just as bright, and as cheerful, and as glad-hearted as ever.

Our hearts are all like locked chambers. Some one else holds the key, and until that key is given up, we know not what we possess ; we can neither suffer nor enjoy to the full measure of our being. Janita's heart was locked. Whether Longden Narrowby held the key, whether it was his to reveal to her all that she might do and all that she might become, no one could tell.

So that pleasant visit wore to a close. Dr. Maguire pronounced his patient quite restored, indeed better than before the attack. "For you know," as he said to Miss Hepzibah, "these fevers often carry away a great deal of mischief that is lurking in the system, leaving it altogether clearer and more vigorous."

To which Miss Hepzibah replied :

"Oh ! yes ; my grandmother always used to say a fever was a wonderful thing for clearing up the complexion. I had one when I was young."

Though, as the doctor thought, it had not cleared Miss Hepzibah's complexion.

And, indeed, it seemed as if Janita's recovery had been moral as well as physical, so much of the old waywardness and wilfulness had been swept away. She felt as if life would be such a

different thing now ; as if even Aunt Hepzibah's worreting, and that incessant, wearisome "Jane, child, Jane !" could never break the deep new peace which had grown up within her during that time of rest.

And now the last day had come. Longden Narrowby had been spending the whole of the previous evening at Meadowthorpe cottage, determined to enjoy his paradise as long as possible, before its gates were partially closed upon him. For he knew well enough that Miss Hepzibah would have no young gentlemen loitering in her dining-room with excuses about sketch-books, or translations of poetry, or designs for cottage gardens, or any such nonsense. A polite call once a month, in presence of Miss Hepzibah, and then only in case he came furnished with a proper, straightforward message, was all that he could expect when Janita was once more safely lodged at the Aspens.

At least that would be all until he had come to the point, and "said something." And though the young man sighed for the *entrée* to that dining-room, for the privilege of hanging up his hat as often as convenient on the ugly old bronze stand

in the front passage, still things remained stationary, still Mrs. Narrowby kept counselling prudence, advising him to wait until he saw his way clear, until there was a more immediate prospect of beginning house-keeping. And at the mention of that matter-of-fact broom and duster subject of house-keeping, involving as it did so much buying of fenders, and fitting of ash-pans, Longden's courage failed; he felt that he really could not make up his mind to that just yet. So he dreamed on about his lady-love's bright eyes, and listened in fancy to her rich sweet voice, and pressed the little hand whenever he had a chance, the "something" never being said. Which was just as Mrs. Narrowby intended it should be.

It was a fine clear morning towards the beginning of March when Janita returned to the Aspens. As she passed through the churchyard for the sake of prolonging her walk, she noted how from every sycamore and chestnut, little white buds were creeping out, and how the snowdrops and primroses, those prophecies of coming Spring, had written their sweet story on every grassy mound. So it seemed to her that now from the graves of her conquered faults there should bloom the sweet

flowers of a new life, the heralds of sunshine and beauty in the soul.

With that thought quickening her, she opened the little wooden gate that led into Professor Ruthven's garden. And yet strive against it as she might, she could not quite keep back a certain feeling of sadness, a sudden closing up as of plants at the approach of frost, when she got into the house, and heard once more the old familiar sounds; the fidgeting screech of the dining-room door which had been screeching just so for six months because no one thought of putting a little oil upon the hinge; Abigail's heavy footfall as she trampled about the kitchen, rattling the tins and candlesticks; the quickting ting of the fussy old clock on the landing, that was always in such a hurry to get its striking done. Miss Hepzibah herself was coming along the passage in her cooking apron and baking sleeves, *en route* for the still-room, the shrine where most of her devotions were paid. When she met Janita, she came to a sudden halt, and eyed the young girl from head to foot.

"Well, Jane, child, so you've got home at last. And looking as fresh as a buttercup, I do declare! Blessings on us! your skin is clearer than when you

first came to live with us ! You're just in time to help me with the open tarts, but you may as well run upstairs first and tell your uncle you've got back ; he was asking something about it this morning."

And Aunt Hepzibah bustled off, leaving Janita with such a chilled feeling at her heart. That sharp business-like "Jane, child," was such a contrast to the gentle "my dear," which had become like a household sound during the last three months. She felt as if she must cry. But no, what was the use of giving way so soon ? She thought of the snowdrops and primroses in the churchyard, and bore up a little longer.

The Professor's study was on the first floor, commanding a fine prospect of the cabbage and rhubarb beds. Indeed that kitchen-garden was so contrived as to intrude upon most of the windows ; but Miss Hepzibah liked to have it in sight ; it was practical, she said, and did some good in the world. The Professor himself, in a grey frieze coat, very ragged at the wristbands, and not much better at the elbows, was seated bolt upright in his chair before a table strewn with diagrams and calculations for a work on Motive Forces, upon which

he had been engaged for the last twelve years.

Janita coughed when she came into the room, but that was no use. Then she went and stirred the fire; but that was no use either. Then she walked round in front of him, and said—

“Please, Uncle Jabez, I’ve come back.”

The professorial eyes were fixed with a clear, steady gaze on the opposite corner of the room, where a couple of skulls were grinning through a torn black curtain. But the skulls evidently had nothing to do with the Professor’s thoughts, which by and by began to ooze slowly into speech.

“To find the effect of the force AB in the oblique direction AC ,” here the long bony arm began to describe an angle in the air—“from B draw a perpendicular to AC ; then AB is equivalent to $AD + DB$.”

“Please, Uncle Jabez, I’ve come back.”

“Equivalent to $AD + DB$, of which DB has no effect in the direction AC .”

“Neither have I,” thought Janita. And then she laid her two hands upon his shoulders, and looking straight into his eyes, said, not without a little tinge of merriment in her voice—

“Please, Uncle Jabez, I’ve come back.”

Which piece of information, repeated now for the third time, produced the desired effect. At least it did produce an effect of some kind, though not perhaps the one desired. For Janita would have liked those long, lean fingers to clasp her just for a little while, and to have felt the touch of those colourless lips upon her own whilst the Professor gave her some sort of welcome, not warm exactly, but at any rate tangible. He did not do that, however. He only looked at her for some seconds very vaguely and abstractedly, as if she were a new sort of motive force that had to be described, and then said, in his hazy, disconnected fashion—

“Oh, well ; yes, that is, you have come back. I, I hope you are better. But—yes, that is it. I have it now, but A B is exactly in that direction ; therefore——”

Poor Janita did not stay to find out what therefore led to. With the quick tears already dropping from her eyelashes, she hurried away into her own room, there to commemorate her arrival at the Aspens with a hearty good cry.

And that was all the welcome she got. Yet neither Aunt Hepzibah nor Uncle Jabez meant to

be unkind, not in the least. They were really glad to see her back again, though the gladness shuffled itself out in a very untangible manner.

She must take the welcome for granted ; many things in this world have to be taken in that way. Only the fiery heart of nineteen is slow to take for granted any welcome that does not gush forth in the beaming look, and the warm caress, and the tender word of love.

And so the day got over. Next morning there came a very long letter from Agnes Home, Janita's favourite companion. Agnes was such a wild, merry, hoydenish mountain maiden, so full of fun and nonsense, always ready for adventures of any kind, for a ramble across the moorland, or a climb up Inverallan crags, or a nutting expedition into the copse, from which she returned with her frock out of the gathers and her arms as full of scratches as Mrs. Home's old-fashioned china plates. And what laughs they used to have up in that great attic, cracking jokes together, and telling stories whilst Bell and Maggie, who represented the common-sense of the family, sat downstairs in the parlour, darning table-cloths. Janita used to laugh at Belle and Maggie, and say they would be sure to be old

maids, because they were so particular about keeping their frocks clean, and mending the holes in their gloves. They were not going to be old maids, though. Agnes had written to say that both her sisters were engaged to be married: Bell to the clergyman at Tullamanoch, a village about two miles away, Maggie to a well-to-do widower, with five children, and a first-rate medical practice. And then she went on to tell Janita that Willie was going to preach his first sermon at Tullamanoch next Sunday, and she did wish so that Janita could go with them to hear him, for he looked so nice in his gown and bands. He had put them on one night when Mr. and Mrs. Home were out, and then got upon a chair and practised saying the benediction, with his arms stretched out so that the sleeves fell in such beautiful folds. The only thing she was afraid of was, that he should tumble as he was going up the pulpit stairs, because his gown was so long in front; and she had recommended him to put one of Ilsie's great check aprons on, and practice walking up and down stairs in it, because if he did tumble, she was quite sure she should burst out laughing, it would be so funny. After he had preached his first sermon he

was going to London to be helper to a Scotch minister there for a few months, and then Agnes hoped he would get a country parish not far away from Inverallan, and marry—she knew whom.

And when Agnes had told all this in her merry, off-hand way, she began to say how they were counting the months until Janita should return to the Manse. For when the Professor fetched her away, it was settled that she should pay them a visit at the end of a twelvemonth, and if she did not feel quite happy at Meadowthorpe, she was to stay with them, and not go back into England any more. She had been at the Aspens six months already, only six more, and then—Oh, Agnes said she could throw down her pen, and dance about the room for joy, at the thought of seeing dear Nyta once more! And she would stay with them, would she not, not as a foster-sister any more, but a real sister, bearing Willie's name, calling his mother hers?

Six months ago how the thought of going back to Inverallan would have made Janita's heart thrill with joy. It was pleasant to think of it now, pleasant to fancy herself rambling up the mountain sides with fleet-footed Agnes, sitting hand in hand

with Willie Home, by the study fire, as they used to do last year at this time, while he read to her out of "Marmion," or "The Lady of the Lake." Yes, the dear old Inverallan life would always be very beautiful, and she would always love Agnes and Bell and Maggie and Willie. But——

And then Aunt Hepzibah called her to beat eggs for some sponge biscuits.

CHAPTER XXIII.



UT now that great event was drawing near, which for many weeks past had gathered to itself all the gossip of the place, and threatened to make a greater commotion in the stagnant waters of Meadowthorpe society, than even the discovery, nine months ago, of Miss Alwyne's writing for the press.

The new steward was to come in March. Mrs. Narrowby had been quite unsuccessful hitherto in her attempts to gain any definite knowledge of himself or his circumstances. Whether he was married or single, young, middle-aged, or elderly, plain or handsome, well-to-do or limited in his means; whether centuries of aristocratic blood coursed through his veins, or whether he belonged to the modern order of self-built men, men who

push their own way to place and fortune—on all these weighty points Gentility Square was entirely in the dark.

The Hall was undergoing great changes. The three box-tree peacocks in front of the principal entrance, which had been allowed to push out leaves at discretion for more than two years, had their tails trimmed, and their top-knots reduced to proper proportions. The huge overgrown laurels, that kept away all the sunshine from the lower windows, were shorn of half their branches; the duckweed was cleared out of the fountain pond; the three little boys who held up the stone urn had their chubby faces washed, and the accumulated slime scoured away from their dimpled elbows, where it had hung in green festoons. And the weed-encumbered walks were cleared, and barrow-loads of rank luxuriant wall-flowers and sweet Williams, and tiger-lilies uprooted from the crowded flower-beds; and where a tangled wilderness of lavender and southern-wood had scented all the air, fashionable shrubs were planted at regular intervals, and long lines of the newest standard rose-trees replaced the thickets of sweet-briar that used to be so delicious after rain. And

the end of all was, that when the "floriculturist," as he called himself, from town, had been at work a month, the Hall garden looked like a country gentleman who has had his hair cut and dressed by a Regent Street hand, transmogrified beyond recognition.

Within, alterations quite as important were being carried forward. Workmen were tearing down the old-fashioned papers, to put up new hangings of the latest, most elegant designs; and re-varnishing the great oak staircase, and touching up into fresh beauty the grand old ceiling, beneath whose fruit and flower-clustered compartments gallant Royalists and their lady-loves had had many a festive banquet. By and by trucks of furniture began to arrive. One or two adventurous ladies, Mrs. Maguire and the Misses Vere Aubrey amongst the number, who were determined not to be kept in the dark any longer, took their morning walks down the St. Olave's road, and with umbrellas or parasols made little peep holes in the thick laurel hedge, through which they could get a glimpse of what was going on inside. But they only brought back word that they had seen a piano and a harp taken in, from which they

inferred that there were young ladies in the family. And Mrs. Maguire deposed to having witnessed the unwrapping of a couch, which she affirmed to be covered with yellow brocatelle ; but Miss Vere Aubrey said it was not a couch at all, only a bath, painted like oak ; and as Mrs. Maguire was known to be short-sighted, most likely it *was* a bath. Both ladies, however, agreed that there were blue silk curtains in the south room, the room where the conservatory had been broken out ; and some beautiful carved oak furniture, which, as Miss Matilda said, placed the respectability of the family beyond a doubt, was standing just inside the front door. A sideboard, she thought it was, and one or two antique chairs. Miss Matilda Vere Aubrey always had confidence in the pedigree of a family which had black oak furniture in its possession.

So far, so good. But no one could find out anything more. For all the rest, Gentility Square must wait until the Hall people, by making a public appearance at church, proclaimed their readiness to receive callers, and subject themselves to the usual scrutiny bestowed upon new comers.

So the time wore on ; past the first Sunday in March, past the second Sunday in March, past equinoctial day, when the wardens gave over heating the church—come rain, hail, blow or snow, the ecclesiastical cellars never gave up their coal after the twenty-first of March. Next day, Thursday, a travelling carriage dashed up to the great entrance of the Hall, followed by two or three cabs. Next day, Friday, claret-liveried footmen were seen strolling about in the back premises ; next day, Saturday, the lilac gowns and white caps of sundry housemaids passed and re-passed the low, black-framed windows of the kitchen department ; and Mrs. Narrowby saw the sunshine flash on what seemed to be golden ringlets behind the blue silk curtains of the south room. Next day, Sunday, the whole family appeared at church for public inspection.

Meadowthorpe church was a standing protest against the old-fashioned and now quite exploded theory, that all men are born free and equal. At least, if born free and equal, Meadowthorpe did its utmost to upset the arrangement by building proper barriers between class and class.

The abbey church of St. Edda had been repaired

and beautified in the reign of Queen Anne, as an old black letter tablet near the communion rail affirmed. Since that time it had remained untouched in the matter of decoration, save an elegant pulpit cushion, the gift of Mr. Mabury, senior, on the occasion of his son's presentation to the living, whose gold fringe and embroidered monogram contrasted somewhat whimsically with the general worm-eaten mustiness of the rest of the church furniture. The pews were very high—so high that, when seated in them, only tall ladies could see over the tops—just the thing for people who liked a quiet nap during service-time; but terribly dolesome to little boys and girls, who had to sit through three heads and an application with no other prospect than the green baize lining, and no other occupation than counting the brass-headed nails which fastened it to the crumbling oak moulding.

It was only the Gentility Square people, though, who sat in green baize pews, with brass nails and bolts to the doors. The common people, such as little Mrs. Brown, and Miss Green, and the tailor, and the shoemaker, and the constable, and the smith, and all that class, heard the word in very narrow

green-painted cells, nearer to the lower end of the church. Light green paint it was, with a great aptitude for coming off; and the plebeian little boys and girls who were audacious enough to put lead pencils in their pockets, found abundant amusement in drawing dogs and horses on the lower panels whilst the heads of the family were asleep. Or, failing lead pencils, finger-nails would answer the purpose equally well, with only a slight additional outlay of labour. The very lowest people of all, the day labourers and almshouse men and paupers, sat on free seats down the middle of the aisle, where there were no facilities either for sleep or recreation, nothing but steady, patient attention to the three heads and the application.

The walls were covered with mural tablets of all descriptions, from the plain wooden panel, whereupon it was stated that underneath lay the remains of Dame Eunice Dykewick, who died at the age of ninety-six, beautiful and very good, onward through intermediate grades of slate and freestone, to the beautiful white marble monument in memory of the first Mrs. Maguire, where two weeping female figures were holding some drapery over an urn, and pointing to an inscription above.

The inscription was in Latin, so the present Mrs. Maguire did not know what it meant. And then there were several hatchments, which gave the place a sombre look, and one or two fine old stained glass windows, representing the legends of the saints; and a musty gallery on one side the chancel, where the Sunday-school children sat, and another opposite, equally musty, where the Gentility Square servants were accommodated, and a third, musty also, at the west-end of the church, where the musical part of the service was performed, under the superintendence of Destiny Smith, parish clerk.

But in vain Destiny, with his attendant band of sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses, rolled forth the introductory anthem on the morning of that third Sunday in March. No attention was paid. Not a head was turned in the direction of the singing-gallery, except, perhaps, Bessie Ashton's, as she gave a shy glance at Roy, who was sitting up in his usual place close by the organ.

For, just as the choir had got their books arranged, and Mr. Newbold, the organist, was drawing out the stops in readiness for the prelude, the south door was thrown open with a flourish, and

the parish beadle, white wand in hand, came up the aisle, followed by the new-comers, whom he was conducting to their place in the Hall pew.

First in order came a lady, who might be fifty-five or sixty, tall, pale, rather thin, very grave and quiet-looking. She walked up the long aisle, past all the gaping day-labourers and paupers, with a steady, dignified step, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, never acknowledging by word or motion their endeavours to squeeze themselves up so that she might have room to pass ; and when she got into the Hall pew, she placed herself with her back to all the people and began to read her prayer-book. Just as the nuns did, Mrs. Mabury thought, in the little Catholic chapel at St. Olave's. And, indeed, the lady looked not unlike a nun in her trailing black garments and long crape veil and black jet cross which hung by a chain at her waist. Surely His Grace had not appointed a Romanist family to the Hall.

Next came a young lady, not in mourning, exquisitely graceful, with that lithe, swaying sort of way which reminds you of mermaids or sea-serpents. And when, as she floated up the narrow aisle, the flounce of her dress caught upon one of

the free-seat knobs, and old Betty Bowers set it straight for her, the lady smiled at Betty, and said "thank you" with the very sweetest smile that had ever been seen in that musty old church. And as the congregation was standing up for the introductory anthem, every one saw that smile. And every one said that the lady who smiled it would be popular in the parish.

Then followed a gentleman, who might be any age, from five and thirty to five and fifty.

That was all. When the gentleman had taken his seat, the beadle shut the door with a flourish and walked into the vestry. A small family, unless some had staid at home. A very small family.

Then the service began. But Mr. Mabury might as well have conducted it in Syriac or Chaldee, for any impression it made on the memories of the people; save, perhaps, those of the Sunday-school children, who were expected to repeat the text and heads of the discourse to their teachers in the afternoon.

Before the preliminary exhortation was nearly finished, Miss Vere Aubrey had satisfied herself that the elder lady's bonnet was Parisian, and the

young lady's cambric pocket-handkerchief positive Valenciennes. And as for the gentleman, just as the congregation was kneeling down to say the general confession, she touched her sister's arm and whispered—

“Peculiar looking, but evidently a person of family.”

And Mrs. Narrowby had come to the conclusion that the young lady was the daughter of the gentleman with grey hair—the young lady had her veil down,—and Mrs. Narrowby thought how providential it was that their boy had not said anything to Miss Raeburn; poor thing, she would be disappointed no doubt, he certainly had been a little too attentive in that direction, but she would get over it in time. And if not, well it was no consequence.

Janita did manage to keep her thoughts from wandering during the intoning of prayers; but when the Rev. Eustace Mabury mounted the pulpit and read out for his text an entire psalm, and announced that in the first place he should give them a slight sketch of its history and composition, and then call upon them to notice this peculiarity, and then direct their attention to that

peculiarity in the structure of the sentences, and thirdly, show them something else, and then introduce the second part of his subject by explaining briefly under four heads some more peculiarities, and then requesting their consideration whilst he proceeded to, &c., she gave up the attempt in despair and let her remaining meditations go out after the strangers.

The Professor's pew adjoined that occupied by the Hall family, but it was a step higher, being built on the raised part of the church which led to the altar. So that by doubling up the cushion under her,—which the naughty girl did,—Janita could see the heads, and a little bit of the shoulders, of the new steward and his female relatives, if relatives they were.

The younger lady had a black lace veil tied closely over her face. Janita could see, however, that her features were very regular and beautiful. She had dark eyes with very arched brows. Janita noticed them particularly, for she had never seen eyes so dark in connection with a face so fair and hair of such pale golden tint as that which strayed from under the lady's bonnet and lay in long curls upon her blue cloak. She had a

very sweet voice too ; though low, it could be clearly heard as she murmured the responses. And her every motion as she bowed at the Gloria Patri, or turned towards the altar when the Creeds were said, was full of indescribable elegance. Why then did not Janita, who was such a lover of beauty, feel her heart warm at once towards the lovely stranger? Janita could not tell. She only knew this, that her heart did *not* warm towards her. And when, as she leaned over the pew to pass a hymn book, and the lady's gloved hand touched hers for a moment, whilst she smiled again that sweet, fascinating smile which had already won the hearts of all the free-seat people, Janita was conscious of a sort of repulsion, almost like that which she felt whenever she met Peter Monk.

It was a relief to turn to the face of the elder lady. That was very calm and still. She was leaning back in the corner of the pew, her eyes fixed on the Dykeland hatchment with the steady gaze of one who looks but sees nothing. She appeared perfectly passive and composed. Evidently she was one of those women in whom self-possession has become a habit ; a woman

it would be impossible to rouse to anger or enthusiasm, or passionate feeling of any kind. You might tell that by the straight upper lip and listless droop of the large eyelid; you might tell it, too, by the tones of her voice, which were cold, calm, monotonous as the slow dropping of water into a stagnant pool.

Janita loved to fancy stories about faces which she saw for the first time. And she wove such a long romance concerning this one, and the possible pain or sorrow of the life that could so have quenched out of it all feeling and emotion, that Mr. Mabury had nearly got to the last of his four heads before she turned her attention to the remaining occupant of the pew, a strong featured, rather grey-haired man; age, uncertain.

Janita was at a loss to decide his precise relationship to the two ladies. He might be the husband of the quiet, passive woman who sat opposite to him, for his hair was about as grey as hers. Or he might be her son, because but for his grey hair, he would pass for thirty-five, and she could not be far from sixty. Only, if men get their characters from their mothers, a passionless nature like hers

could never have blossomed out into the quick fiery earnestness of which his countenance was the index. And then that golden-haired lady, was she his sister, or his wife, or only a visitor at the Hall? And yet she could scarcely be a visitor, for she seemed almost too much at ease with her companions, looking up into their faces often with a smile, half of amusement, half of playful contempt, as an unusually sonorous snore came from the painted pews, or an unlucky little urchin, overpowered by slumber, tumbled off his bench up in the Sunday-school gallery. A smile, which was not nearly so beautiful as that she had given to Betty Bowers at the commencement of service; but, of course, as the congregation generally could not see it, it was of no moment. And she could scarcely be a visitor either, because, though the gentleman was scrupulously polite in his demeanour, still he offered none of those little unnecessary attentions which so elegant and graceful a stranger, if she had been a stranger, would justly have expected; nor did his deep-set eyes gleam with a tenderer light when her own sought them. No, she must belong to the family in some way.

At last Janita determined that she was the

daughter of the elderly lady, and that the gentleman was her husband. He was a dark-looking man, rather tall, not very. The lower point of the Dykeland hatchment, which, as he stood under it during the chanting of the psalms, kept scraping against his head, was exactly five feet eleven from the pavement. He was broad, strongly built, not at all handsome. Indeed Miss Vere Aubrey had been quite correct when she whispered to her sister, "peculiar looking." Only very resolute and straightforward and decided; as anyone might tell by the unembarrassed way in which he faced the congregation, and the firm, steady grip with which he held his great prayer-book. When the sermon was about half-way through, he leaned back and closed his eyes.

Surely the new steward was not going to sleep in church! For the credit of his position, and for the sake of example, especially to the Sunday scholars, who from their musty gallery were gaping down upon the Hall pew, Janita hoped he would not commit himself to such an extent. And indeed, anyone might have thought he was asleep, except that now and then he lifted his hand to put away the hair from his forehead. Perhaps

he had only shut his eyes that he might listen more attentively ; many good church people, as well as dissenters, receive pulpit ministrations with their eyes shut. However, the nap, real or apparent, gave Janita an opportunity of studying his face without fear of observation.

She thought that if these people really did belong to the same family, nature had tried how far by temperament and disposition they could be separated. The elder lady was indifference personified ; her countenance told its own story after the first glance, and had no more to reveal. The younger lady had a certain wily, seductive beauty, a syren face which might or might not belong to a syren soul. He—husband, brother, son, or whatever relation he might bear to the others—was cast in an entirely different mould. At first his face gave Janita the impression of strength chiefly ; force, courage, resolution. The lines of it indicated great energy, a sort of stubborn, obstinate perseverance. He was a man whom it would be unwise to trifle with, and very dangerous to offend ; a man who would rejoice in having something to overcome, who would live out his true life in the midst of action and difficulty.

That was what she thought at first. By and by she discovered a certain gentleness shining through the strength; a sort of under beauty, as when beneath the great strong arms of forest oaks you find little violets and primroses, which look fairer and bloom more safely for the shadow which overwraps them.

Janita was still looking at that face, when the owner of it, opening his eyes, fixed them full upon her. She was very vexed. She would have given anything not to have been looking at him just then. And she began to listen very attentively to Mr. Mabury, who had got into his application at last. But she felt rather than saw that those eyes were upon her still, and it was a great relief when the rector said "finally, brethren," and the clerk gave out that the people were to sing to the praise and glory of God, the three first verses of the Morning hymn.

After that the beadle came with his white wand, and opened the Hall pew. It was the custom in Meadowthorpe church for the steward's family to go out first, then the green baize worshippers, then the painted ones, then the free seats, and last of all, the Sunday scholars. The tall lady in black

walked down the aisle calmly, rigidly, coldly as before; looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. The golden-haired stranger followed her with swaying, undulating grace, like a water lily rocked on the bosom of some quiet lake. Last of all the new steward, scanning those upturned village faces, like one accustomed to study human nature and master it.

The autocrat and his subjects had met for the first time. Experience only could tell whether, as manager of the broad estates of Meadowthorpe and Dykeland, Gavin Rivers was the right man in the right place.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

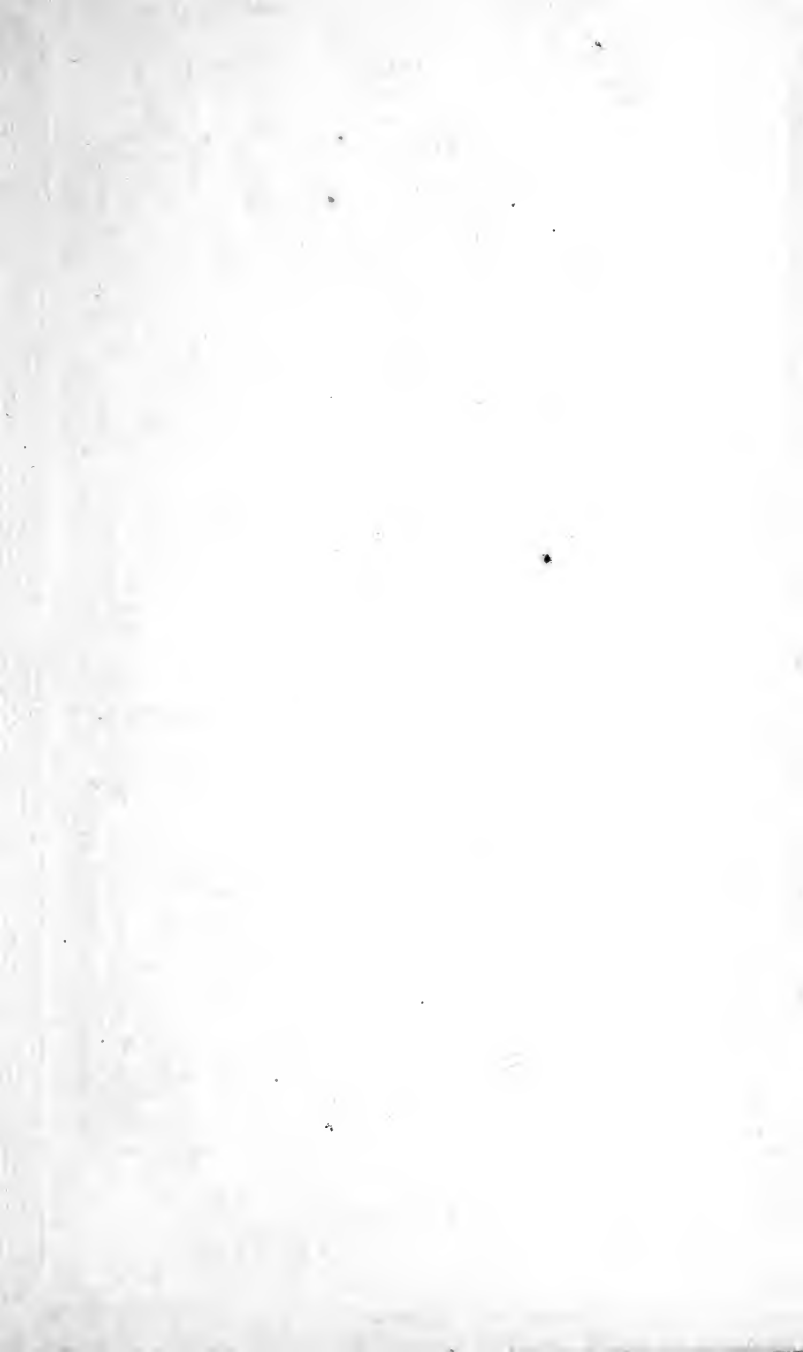
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